

Excluded Icons: Locating the *Femina Sacra* in the Green Revolution, the Arab Spring, and the Occupy Movement

By
Roisin Berghaus

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Supervisor: Professor Emel Akçalı

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Abstract

The images of Nedā Aghā-Soltān's death during the Iranian Green Revolution, Dorli Rainey's pepper spray attack at the Occupy Seattle protests, and the beating of the "girl in the blue bra" in Tahrir Square during the Arab Spring have been deemed "iconic" by witnesses and sympathizers of these three demonstrations. In spite of the prominence of these stories, however, news reports of the events pay little attention to the women themselves, focusing instead on these women's passivity at the hands of brutal police and military forces. This paper seeks to ask the question of how, and to what extent, the act of publicizing images of these women's attacks has in fact silenced their testimonies. By engaging with aesthetic theory, Agamben's concept of the *Muselmann*, and Lentin's and Masters's *femina sacra*, this essay aims to identify and analyze both the dominant narratives of these women and their societies that are reinforced through the perpetuation of particular still images of their brutalizations in America print media, and the enduring images that remain in the memories of locals present in the cities at the time the incidents occurred. This project ultimately demonstrates that the very inclusion of images of attacks on these three women has marginalized their testimonies as larger narratives about women's fragility and passivity, as well as the violent police forces, regimes and cultures of their respective countries, have prevailed.

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Introduction

On 20 June 2009, during the Iranian protests against what many considered an unfair election, a woman approaches an anti-regime demonstration in Tehran. Suddenly, a shot is fired to her chest and she falls to the ground. Three men surround her. One attempts to stanch the blood pouring from her chest while another shouts her name, Nedā, in desperation. Her eyes begin to roll into the back of her head. Blood emerges from her nose and mouth and her hands fall limp by her side.¹ The incident is recorded on a bystander's mobile phone camera and shortly thereafter uploaded to YouTube. Within hours, the video has been seen – and denounced as an act of state brutality – by fellow Iranians and Green Revolution sympathizers throughout the world. It is not long before American President Barack Obama publicly decries the behavior of the Iranian government and paramilitary forces that are thought to be responsible for Nedā Āghā-Soltān's death. Seen as a strong reminder of the myriad of atrocities the Iranian regime has been deemed responsible for, Nedā is soon named the “angel” and the “voice” of the 2009 Green Revolution.²

On 15 November 2011, as protestors involved in the Occupy Seattle movement enter the city's downtown core after being cleared from their camp in a local park, police forces fire pepper spray into the crowd in an attempt to disperse hostile demonstrators. Local photographer Joshua Trujillo is among the crowd and captures the aftermath with his camera.³ Amidst the photographs of protestors lying on the ground or being carried away by fellow demonstrators, one photo gains especial notoriety in the aftermath of the event. The photo of Dorli Rainey, an octogenarian activist drenched in pepper spray neutralizing fluid staring into the camera lens as she is carried away by two

¹ FEELTHELIGHT, *Iran, Tehran: Wounded Girl Dying in Front of Camera, Her Name Was Neda*, Digital (YouTube, 2009), <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bbdEf0QRsLM>.

² Glenna DeRoy, “In Iran, One Woman - Neda - Becomes a Symbol,” *USA Today*, sec. World, accessed January 10, 2013, <http://content.usatoday.com/communities/ondeadline/post/2009/06/68337891/1>.

³ Joshua Trujillo, “Occupy Movement in Seattle,” Photo Blog, *Joshua Trujillo Photography*, November 15, 2011, <http://joshuatrujillo.photoshelter.com/gallery/Occupy-movement-in-Seattle/G0000R.Ry1jGGzsc/>.

demonstrators, is shared in numerous local, national, and international newspapers over the coming weeks as local police forces comes under scrutiny by sympathizers and fellow Occupy protestors from the United States and abroad. Rainey herself is quickly deemed the “face” not only of the Seattle protests, but of the entire Occupy movement.⁴

A month later, on 17 December 2011, a video appears on YouTube that shows the brutal beating of a female demonstrator in Tahrir Square during protests against the ongoing military rule in Egypt that had begun shortly after President Hosni Mubarak’s resignation. The woman is dragged by a group of police officers into the street. As they drag her, her *abaya* is ripped off and her bare torso, covered only by a blue bra, is exposed to the camera. A police officer steps on the woman’s stomach before another covers her up with her *abaya*. The officers then quickly disperse and leave her in the street.⁵ The still image of her exposed blue bra appears in the coming days in a few local independent papers, and a week later is used by protestors in a demonstration against the military’s treatment of women. The image also gains international attention as American Secretary of State Hilary Clinton refers to the act as “shameful” for the Egyptian military and society.⁶ The nameless “girl in the blue bra” is thus quickly considered to be an “icon” of both local protests and the entire Arab Spring movement.⁷

⁴ Melissa Bell, “Dorli Rainey, 84, the New Face of the Occupy Protests,” *The Washington Post*, November 17, 2011, sec. World; G Danken, “84-Jährige Aktivistin nach Pfeffersprayattacke im Interview (84-Year-Old Activist after Pepper Spray Attack in Interview),” Blog, *Freies im Wort und Schrift (Free in Speech and Writing)*, November 17, 2011, <http://freies-im-wort-und-schrift.info/2011/11/17/84-jahrige-aktivistin-nach-pfeffersprayattacke-im-interview/#more-4772>; Patrick Kehoe, “Protestors’ Stories: Dorli Rainey and Occupy Seattle,” *The Guardian*, January 13, 2012, sec. World, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/jan/13/protesters-dorli-rainey-occupy-seattle>.

⁵ Hna Fi Hna DZ, *Shocking Video: Girl Brutally Beaten by Egypt Military*, Digital (YouTube, 2011), <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BJnI2LZ5NRI>.

⁶ Reuters, “Hillary Clinton’s Condemnation of Blue-Bra Beating ‘Interference’ in Egypt, Foreign Minister Says,” *National Post*, December 21, 2011, sec. World, <http://news.nationalpost.com/2011/12/21/hillary-clintons-condemnation-of-blue-bra-beating-interference-in-egypt-foreign-minister-says/>.

⁷ Michael Higgins, “Police Beating of ‘Girl in the Blue Bra’ Becomes New Rallying Call for Egyptians,” *National Post*, December 20, 2011, sec. World, <http://news.nationalpost.com/2011/12/20/beatings-of-blue-bra-woman-reignites-egyptian-protests/>.

Feminist critical theorists have emphasized repeatedly in recent decades that women's stories are rarely present in conventional narratives of international politics. Christine Sylvester, Cynthia Enloe, and Cristina Masters, to name only a few, have noted that transnational deals and military tensions between countries are typically stories of men conducting international affairs with other male heads-of-state while women's stories remain marginalized – if not entirely absent – from geopolitics.⁸ On the surface, the cases of the “voice” Nedā, the “face” Rainey, and the “icon” “girl in the blue bra,” may seem to suggest that women's stories are gaining attention and being heard in international politics. Indeed, in all three cases, similar images of police and military brutality against male victims simply did not command the same impact within the international community as these images did: Nedā was the seventeenth reported victim in the Green Revolution, and yet those preceding her – the majority of whom were male – received little individual attention from the international community.⁹ Plenty of Trujillo's photos from Seattle showed men covered in pepper spray as well, yet these were not considered iconic photographs.¹⁰ And although a young male is being beaten by police a few feet away from the “girl in the blue bra” throughout the YouTube video of the event, his story does not spark further protests within Egypt or a mention from the American Secretary of State.¹¹ Is this a sign of a shift in geopolitics? Are women's experiences truly beginning to move from the periphery to the centre of discussions on state-society relations?

⁸ Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 1–3; Cristina Masters, “*Femina Sacra*: The ‘War On/of Terror’, Women and the Feminine,” *Security Dialogue* 40, no. 1 (2009): 30; Christine Sylvester, *Feminist Theory and International Relations in a Postmodern Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 9.

⁹ DeRoy, “Nedā Becomes a Symbol.”

¹⁰ Trujillo, “Occupy Seattle.”

¹¹ Hna Fi Hna DZ, *Girl Beaten by Egypt Military*, pt. 0:29. Notably, some videos of the event depict another woman next to the “girl in the blue bra” who is also beaten by police after attempting to save the former. This woman, named “the girl in the red jacket,” also received a small amount of coverage, but did not receive nearly the amount of local and international attention as the “girl in the blue bra.” (Robert Mackey, “Video of Egyptian Women's March in Cairo,” *The New York Times*, December 20, 2011, sec. World, <http://thelede.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/12/20/video-of-egyptian-womens-march-in-cairo/>.)

This essay takes the view that such a claim would be premature. Although it is true that the images of these women, brutalized by police, have circulated widely both locally and overseas, an evaluation of American newspaper reports surrounding the events in all three cases in fact make little reference to the women as active agents who participated in protest movements because of their desire for change. Instead, these women have been repeatedly characterized both through the still images that were chosen to represent the events and the personal details that circulated in American newspaper articles about them in the weeks following the incidents as passive victims of gratuitous police brutality or cultural predispositions to violence. The legacy of this characterization is revealed in the memories of locals who were present in these countries at the time the events occurred: Interviews with individuals from Tehran, Seattle, and Cairo show that, although the images of these women remain embedded in their memories, little is remembered of the women themselves beyond their victimhood.

The question this paper seeks to address, then, is “how, and to what extent, has the act of publicizing images of these women’s attacks silenced their testimonies?” To answer this question, this paper adopts the premise of aesthetic theory that the fundamental ambiguity of imagery renders photographs susceptible to interpretations that both form and perpetuate dominant political narratives.¹² Since aesthetic theory does not identify the specific narratives of Nedā, Rainey, and the “girl in the blue bra” that have developed, this project also engages with Giorgio Agamben’s concept of the *Muselmann*, the complete witness of brutality whose narrative becomes lost in its retelling to understand how these women’s testimonies have become silenced over time.¹³ This paper departs from a strict reading of Agamben, however, and further engages with Ronit Lentin’s and Cristina Mas-

¹² Laura J. Shepherd, “Visualising Violence: Legitimacy and Authority in the ‘War on Terror’,” *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 1, no. 2 (2008): 215.

¹³ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 185; Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive* (New York: Zone Books, 2000), 33–37.

ters's concepts of *femina sacra*, which seek to elucidate the specific experiences of women who are rendered complete witnesses in international affairs.¹⁴ Ultimately, this paper will demonstrate that the testimonies of Nedā, Rainey, and the “girl in the blue bra” have consistently been marginalized through the circulation of the images of their attacks, which have primarily served to reinforce larger narratives of women's passivity and police brutality.

This paper is divided into four chapters. In the first chapter, I outline the principles of aesthetic theory and how it has recently been applied to of International Relations scholarship, as well as the concepts of the *homo sacer* and *femina sacra* as articulated by Agamben, Lentin and Masters. Through this section, I show how these three concepts can be used together to better understand the impact of the images of Nedā, Rainey, and the “girl in the blue bra” on public opinion. In the second, third, and fourth chapters of this paper, I analyze the three cases empirically. In the second chapter, I engage in a discourse analysis of the photographs and videos of the three incidents. Here, I seek to examine what the particular images that of these women that circulated following the events communicate about the women, their experiences, and the forces that brutalized them. In the third chapter, I analyze newspaper articles that appeared in the month following the events that appeared in three widely-circulating American newspapers (*The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, and *The Washington Post*). This section seeks to reveal the disparity between what the images and videos communicate about these women's experiences and what was reported about them in American newspapers. In the fourth chapter, I report on unstructured interviews conducted with locals who were present in the countries at the time these events occurred. Here, I seek to assess what aspects of these women's experiences remain salient to those who were familiar with the events. Throughout these chapters I relate my analysis to aesthetic theory, Agamben's *Muselmann*, and Lentin's and

¹⁴ Ronit Lentin, “*Femina Sacra*: Gendered Memory and Political Violence,” *Women's Studies International Forum* 29, no. 5 (2006): 465; Masters, “*Femina Sacra*,” 34–35.

Masters's *femina sacra* to show that the act of publicizing and circulating the images of Nedā, Rainey, and the “girl in the blue bra” has silenced these women and marginalized their experiences.

Chapter 1: The Aesthetics of Bare Life

The cases of Nedā, Rainey, and the “girl in the blue bra” will be explored through the lens of aesthetic theory, Agamben’s *Muselmann* and Lentin’s and Masters’s *femina sacra*. This chapter first highlights the principles of aesthetic theory that are used in the empirical section of this paper, and then delineates Agamben’s concept of the *Muselmann* and Lentin’s and Masters’s *femina sacra* while showing how these frameworks relate to the empirical section of this paper.

1.1 Aesthetic Theory and International Relations

Through the lens of aesthetic theory, one can claim that photographic depictions of international events are fundamentally ambiguous and thus can be interpreted in ways that reinforce dominant political narratives. As such, it is central to understanding how the photographs of Nedā, Rainey, and the “girl in the blue bra” became iconic during their respective protest movements.¹⁵ In addition, this theoretical framework also helps to explain why these particular images were able to reinforce certain questionable truth claims about these women and the forces that brutalized them.

Aesthetic theory has become increasingly prominent in poststructuralist International Relations scholarship since Roland Bleiker wrote of the “aesthetic turn” in the discipline in 2001. In his manifesto on visual culture in International Relations, he argued that an examination of photographs, films, pictures, sounds, and narratives – media frequently considered by “realist” scholars to be inappropriate as sources of qualitative data – can elucidate dominant public opinions on local and foreign politics.¹⁶ He emphasizes that the value of aesthetic theory lies in its premise that imagery does not show events as they truly occurred, but serves instead as an interpretation of reality. More-

¹⁵ Roland Bleiker, “The Aesthetic Turn in International Political Theory,” *Millennium Journal of International Studies* 30, no. 3 (2001): 510; Axel Heck and Gabi Schlag, “Imagining Europe’s Security Engagement in Africa – Justification Narratives and Visual Culture” (presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Studies Association, New Orleans, 2010), 11.

¹⁶ Bleiker, “The Aesthetic Turn in International Political Theory,” 509–510, 526.

over, aesthetic theory argues that it is within this schism between what is represented and its representation that politics occurs. Bleiker thus argues that more attention should be paid to the use of imagery in global politics in order to understand how visual representations of international events help to construct and perpetuate political ideologies.¹⁷

Bleiker pays particular attention throughout his manifesto to the ways in which photographs serve as an interpretation of political events. Even though a photograph may seem to be a true representation of an event, he argues, it only shows one angle of a subject that has been captured at a particular moment of an incident. As such, a photograph does not portray an event in and of itself, but instead serves as an ambiguous representation of an event which is open to interpretation. He further emphasizes that the decision made by a photographer on what is to be captured within an image has “nothing to do with the essence of the actual object that is photographed.”¹⁸ Bleiker’s focus on the use of photography in shaping interpretations about political events is particularly relevant to this current study. As will be shown in the following chapters, the selection of certain still images of the videos of Nedā and the “girl in the blue bra,” as well as the spread of Rainey’s image at the exclusion of Trujillo’s other photographs from the Occupy Seattle protests, have led to particular characterizations of these women and their attackers that appear ambiguous in light of other video, photographic and witness testimony.

Recent scholarship involving aesthetics in International Relations serves as an empirical illustration of the use of photography in shaping constructions of political events and actors. In a 2008 article, scholar Laura Shepherd examines the truth claims and interpretations that have emerged following the publication of Amnesty International’s images of Guantanamo Bay, the White House’s photographic essay on the Presidential response to the 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center, and

¹⁷ Ibid., 510.

¹⁸ Ibid., 513.

leaked photographs of tortured Abu Ghraib detainees. Through her analysis of the conflicting truth claims made by the images of Guantanamo Bay and the Presidential response to September 11th, she shows how imagery has served as a particularly effective method of justifying or delegitimizing America's War on Terror: While the images of distressed yet firm politicians in the days following the attacks on the World Trade Centre present a rationalization for the war, photographs of orange-clad detainees present a strong counterclaim that the war was unjustified.¹⁹ Furthermore, her examination of dominant positive and negative responses to the photographs from Abu Ghraib prison shows how the same photographs were interpreted in contradictory ways by those who either supported or opposed America's involvement in Iraq. The interpretation of these images as acceptable because they showed a tortured enemy, a sign of a few "bad apples" in the military, or an indication that the American military itself was dysfunctional, depended on the political orientation of the viewer at the time the images circulated.²⁰ Axel Heck and Gabi Schlag similarly employ aesthetic theory to examine the European Union's²¹ use of photographic reports as a "visual justification" for their peacekeeping mission in Congo.²² The authors show how the pictures of EU officials in the region communicate the idea that they serve as solid and trustworthy commanders, humanitarians, diplomats, and heads of state.²³ This is further strengthened, they argue, through the use of imagery of starving Congolese children and the omission of images of EU weaponry or combat operations.²⁴ Taken together, these papers illustrate that imagery does not necessarily speak for itself, but can instead serve to shape public opinion and reinforce dominant narratives of political events. As will be shown later in this paper, the images of Nedā, Rainey, and the "girl in the blue bra" were similarly

¹⁹ Shepherd, "Visualising Violence," 216–17.

²⁰ Ibid., 216–222.

²¹ Hereafter EU.

²² Heck and Schlag, "Imagining Europe's Security Engagement in Africa," 16.

²³ Ibid., 17.

²⁴ Ibid., 19.

ambiguous, yet were able to reinforce prevailing political notions about police brutality and women in protest movements.

1.2 The *Muselmann* and the *Femina Sacra*

While aesthetic theory provides a broad framework for understanding the role of visual imagery in politics, it does not alone explain why the images of Nedā, Rainey, and the “girl in the blue bra” drew more attention to police brutality and cultural violence than to the victims themselves. The phenomenon of simultaneously including and excluding victims’ experiences in the political sphere is a concept that has been thoroughly elucidated by Giorgio Agamben. His concept of the *homo sacer*, a life that is neither animal nor a fully politically-qualified human, provide a useful background for understanding how these three victims’ experiences have been paradoxically marginalized by their repeated and widespread circulation.

Agamben’s concept of the *homo sacer* is in large part a continuation of the poststructuralist concept of biopolitics. Broadly defined, the concept of “biopolitics” is concerned with the distinction between two forms of life: Natural, biological life, which lacks juridical rights and political capacity; and politically-qualified life, which is of value to society and which can participate in the political sphere.²⁵ In his conceptualization of biopolitics, Agamben emphasizes that those who have been politically actualized are responsible for determining which other forms of life can become similarly politically qualified.²⁶ He argues that the act of determining which individuals are politically qualified reduces an individual to the position of the *homo sacer*, position that is simultaneously included and excluded from the political sphere.²⁷ The term *homo sacer* is a reference to an obscure

²⁵ Leland de la Durantaye, *Giorgio Agamben: A Critical Introduction* (California: Stanford University Press, 2009), 203–205, 227.

²⁶ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 1–2, 4.

²⁷ Lee Spinks, “Except for Law: Raymond Chandler, James Ellroy, and the Politics of Exception,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 107, no. 1 (2008): 122.

Roman legal code that allowed for the punishment of certain crimes by stripping the perpetrator of their legal rights. The *homo sacer* was thus exposed to the risk of being killed by other individuals who would not be deemed guilty of murder for doing so. Unlike other non-human life forms, however, this individual was deemed unworthy of use in ritual sacrifice. Thus, the *homo sacer* occupied a precarious position that was both within a politico-legal system that prohibited the sacrifice of human beings, while also outside of it, lacking legal protection and rights.²⁸

Agamben further emphasizes that a politically-qualified power is only able to deny rights to another human being in a “state of exception,” a condition such as that when an individual or a population is declared an enemy of the state, is a slave or foreigner, or is physically incapable of making decisions and speaking for himself, such as an overcomatose patient.²⁹ The lives that are scrutinized in such states of exception are therefore included within the state, yet are located between biological life and politically-qualified life.³⁰ One modern example of *homo sacer* that Agamben expanded on in particular was the *Muselmann*. This figure, which Agamben adopts from a work by Holocaust survivor Primo Levi, is the individual in a concentration camp who has been so thoroughly mistreated and humiliated that his humanity is unrecognizable. Agamben describes the *Muselmann* as a being “from whom humiliation, horror, and fear had so taken away all consciousness and all personality as to make him absolutely apathetic” to the terrors of the camp.³¹ In spite of being surrounded by others, he is “mute and absolutely alone,” and in a state “more or less close to death.”³² Agamben emphasizes in his exposition of the *Muselmann* that these individuals constitute the most competent witnesses of the atrocities of the concentration camp because they have fallen

²⁸ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 4–6.

²⁹ Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 1–2; Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 163–64; Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 37–38.

³⁰ Agamben, *The Open*, 38; Penelope Deutscher, “The Inversion of Exceptionality: Foucault, Agamben, and ‘Reproductive Rights,’” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 107, no. 1 (2008): 58.

³¹ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 185.

³² de la Durantaye, *Giorgio Agamben*, 263, 269; Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 41–44.

victim to its most extreme horrors. However, as exterminated casualties, they are also unable to speak of their own experiences. The atrocities that these individuals were subject to are instead documented through the stories of survivors and photographic records. These records are “incomplete witnesses” that fail to represent the complexity and full horror of what the *Muselmann* has experienced.³³ As will be shown later in this study, the concept of the *Muselmann* as the complete witness whose stories have been distorted through the narratives of survivors is of particular relevance to the cases of Nedā, Rainey, and the “girl in the blue bra,” because the circulation of the images of their brutalization and the interpretations of their experiences recounted in American newspaper articles has reduced their experiences to ambiguous single images that have been interpreted in questionable ways.

Agamben’s *homo sacer* has received a notable amount of attention in recent years. The political philosophy journal *Theory and Event* devoted a section of one of their issues to his ideas in 2001, while *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, an American political journal, dedicated a special issue to articles applying this concept in 2008.³⁴ However, in spite of the appeal and applicability of the *homo sacer*, some scholars have called into question the extent to which his concepts are representative of the diversity of victims’ experiences in states of emergency. One particularly strong criticism that Agamben has received in recent years is that his delineation of *homo sacer* makes no reference to women’s experiences. Scholars such as Penelope Deutscher, Ewa Plonowska Ziarek, and Claire Colebrook have emphasized that more attention should be paid to the gender variable because women’s historical exclusion from the realm of politics would seem to suggest that they would be particularly prone to being categorized as bare life. Furthermore, as Ziarek posits in her 2008 article

³³ Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 35–37.

³⁴ See Alison Ross, “Introduction,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 107, no. 1 (2008): 1–13; William Chaloupka and Thomas Dumm, “Introduction,” *Theory and Event* 5, no. 2 (2001): n.p.

on British suffragettes, women reduced to bare life may have markedly different experiences from men because of the unique gendered stereotypes that women are prone to.³⁵

The absence of women's experiences from the concept of *homo sacer* has recently been addressed by scholars Ronit Lentin and Cristina Masters in their concepts of the *femina sacra*. The term *femina sacra* was coined by Lentin in her 2006 article examining the absence of women's narratives in Transnistrian Holocaust survivor stories. In this article, she shows that women's testimonies are prone to be misconstrued through the photographic evidence of atrocities, narratives of brutality, and survivors' stories because the reproduction of these forms of testimony tend to reduce female victims to particularly fragile, vulnerable, passive, and sexualized beings.³⁶ As she demonstrates throughout her study, the recorded narratives of women transported to Transnistria during the Holocaust typically differ from those of men along gendered lines: While women's recorded narratives emphasize their virtue, propriety, or the tragedy of their being separated from their young children, men's narratives more frequently focus on their prewar occupations or their participation in Nazi resistance efforts. She emphasizes that this dichotomy does not mean that women were not involved with resistance movements, but only that these stories are underemphasized as their roles as mothers, wives, and caregivers take precedence.³⁷ Lentin thus shows in this study that women's experiences can be simultaneously exaggerated and marginalized in wartime narratives because reports of violence against women typically focus on stereotypical assumptions about women and whether the victims conform to the positive or negative associations therewith. As will be demonstrated later in this study, the still images, newspaper articles and interview accounts of Nedā, Rainey, and the "girl

³⁵ Deutscher, "The Inversion of Exceptionality," 59; Ewa Plonowska Ziarek, "Bare Life on Strike: Notes on the Biopolitics of Race and Gender," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 107, no. 1 (2008): 103; Claire Colebrook, "Agamben: Aesthetics, Potentiality, and Life," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 107, no. 1 (2008): 107–108.

³⁶ Lentin, "*Femina Sacra*," 466; Sara R. Horowitz, "Women in Holocaust Literature: Engendering Trauma Memory," in *Women in the Holocaust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 364–65; Zygmunt Bauman, "Categorical Murder, or: How to Remember the Holocaust," in *Re-Presenting the Shoah for the 21st Century*, ed. Ronit Lentin (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2004), 28.

³⁷ Lentin, "*Femina Sacra*," 464, 469–71.

in the blue bra” all tend to overlook these women’s resistance and reduce them to passive victims of brutality in precisely the way Lentin suggests.

Masters further expands on the concept of *femina sacra* in her 2009 article on narratives of women associated with the American War on Terror. In this article, she contrasts the American media’s inclusion of particular white American women’s stories with their exclusion of racialized American and Iraqi women and shows how the resulting narratives have served to reinforce extant notions of the necessity and rightness of the occupation of Iraq. She begins with the premise that the feminized private sphere is an example of an Agambenian “state of exception” and states that women are transformed into *feminae sacrae* by their reduction to either Madonnas or whores.³⁸ She shows how the popularity of the narrative of Jessica Lynch, a beautiful and feminine American soldier who was captured by Iraqi soldiers within weeks of the beginning of the occupation, helped to reinforce the belief that the military was fighting a just war in Iraq because they were protecting American women. She also highlights the fact that her story was exaggerated and falsified in a subsequent film that depicted her as helpless against cruel Iraqi captors.³⁹ Masters also contrasts the story of Lynndie England, a masculine-looking American soldier who was condemned for her involvement in the torture of detained Iraqi prisoners at Abu Ghraib prison with the media silence on the stories of tortured female Iraqi prisoners of war.⁴⁰ The focus on England’s dismissal from the army, coupled with the exclusion of the narratives of female Iraqi prisoners, helped to reinforce the belief that the American military was a respectable organization while England was simply a “bad apple.”⁴¹ Masters considers the media’s ability to include and exaggerate certain narratives while excluding others to be

³⁸ Masters, “*Femina Sacra*,” 33, 35.

³⁹ Ibid., 36–37.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 37–39.

⁴¹ Ibid., 31–32.

a prime example of how these women were rendered *feminae sacrae*.⁴² Echoing Lentin's assertion that the very inclusion of particular narratives of women's experiences serves to exclude women's experiences from the collective memory of events, Masters ultimately argues that these women have all been silenced, either through their misrepresentation or their exclusion from war narratives, and that this silencing has reduced these women to *feminae sacrae* while reinforcing the idea that the War on Terror was justified.⁴³ As will be demonstrated later in this study, the gendered narratives of Nedā, Rainey, and the "girl in the blue bra" similarly echo the experiences the women included in Master's investigation – innocent Jessica Lynch in particular – who have been reduced to *feminae sacrae* through the retelling of their stories.

The concepts of the *Muselmann* as a complete witness and the *femina sacra*, combined with the principles of aesthetic theory, offer a starting point for an investigation into the experiences and narratives of Nedā, Rainey, and the "girl in the blue bra" that have dominated as a result of the circulation of images of their attacks. It will be shown in the following chapters that, although it may appear that the use of their images and their classification as "icons" for their movements seems to suggest that these women have gained great international attention, it is precisely because these women have been repeatedly – and almost without exception – characterized as passive victims of brutal officers and cultures through the circulation of these images that their own complete testimonies have been marginalized.

⁴² Ibid., 31. Here, Masters suggests that the media as well as the U.S. government were responsible for shaping public opinion about these women and reducing them to *feminae sacrae*. This is particularly relevant to the current study, as this paper attempts to show that American print media narratives were responsible for perpetuating dominant narratives about police brutality in Iran and Egypt while reducing the Nedā, Rainey, and the "girl in the blue bra" to stereotypically passive victims.

⁴³ Ibid., 35.

Chapter 2: Images as incomplete witnesses

As was previously mentioned, Lentin's 2006 article provides three channels of investigation, imagery, narratives, and survivor stories, which can be examined to identify the *femina sacra* in the aftermath of international or state brutality. In the next three chapters, I engage with the photographs and videos that depicted these three events, articles from three American newspapers that appeared in month following each incident, and locals who lived in the countries at the time the events took place to investigate the extent to which the testimonies of Nedā, Rainey, and the "girl in the blue bra" have been marginalized through the circulation of the images of their attacks.

Lentin's assertion that the circulation of brutal images can detract from the narratives of *feminae sacrae* can be examined by engaging in a discourse analysis of the photographs and videos of Nedā, Rainey, and the "girl in the blue bra." The application of discourse analysis to photographs, or taking imagery as "texts," which serve as a way to form or perpetuate dominant political or cultural assumptions and narratives, is one that was also applied by Shepherd, Heck, and Schlag in their aforementioned articles on the aesthetics of the War on Terror and the EU's involvement in Congo.⁴⁴ Following in a similar vein as their studies, I examined the images that circulated internationally of the attacks on Nedā, Rainey, and the "girl in the blue bra" to determine what particular narratives and constructions of these women and the forces that brutalized them are communicated and reinforced therein.

Before detailing the results of my analysis, a more specific explanation of my methodology needs to be elucidated. For this portion of my investigation, I employed Potter and Wetherell's method of discourse analysis. Their method involves examining texts – in this case, images – for re-

⁴⁴ Norman Fairclough, "Critical Discourse Analysis," in *The Routledge Handbook of Discourse Analysis*, ed. James Paul Gee and Michael Handford (London: Routledge, 2012), 11; Shepherd, "Visualising Violence," 217; Heck and Schlag, "Imagining Europe's Security Engagement in Africa," 12–13.

peated phrases and themes, and also noting the ways in which different texts either perpetuate or present alternate descriptions of events. What is important in this method is the identification of both consistency and variability in a text, as well as the ways in which single events are connected with larger narratives.⁴⁵ To apply this method to the three cases under investigation in this project, I located copies of the videos of Nedā and the “girl in the blue bra” that were uploaded to YouTube within twenty-four hours of the events, as well as Trujillo’s image gallery of the Occupy Seattle protests.⁴⁶ In all cases, one particular image was taken from the videos and gallery that later appeared in news reports from the United States in the following days and weeks. I thus examined these images in contrast to the omitted sections of the videos and gallery to highlight what these specific photographs communicated that other portions of the more complete narratives did not. I then identified the narratives that were reinforced through the focus on these particular moments, as well as on what became lost by excluding other portions of the videos and gallery. The goal of this was to determine which characterizations of these women ultimately prevailed over alternative depictions, and to relate this to both aesthetic theory and the concepts of the complete witness and the *femina sacra*.

The photographs, still images and links to the videos examined in this study appear in the Appendix of this report. The rest of this chapter highlights the findings of this portion of my empirical investigation.

The video of Nedā, which has been viewed more than one and a half million times on YouTube, lasts approximately forty seconds.⁴⁷ The video begins after she has been shot (the shooter and her gunshot wound are not visible at any point in the video), and first shows four men sur-

⁴⁵ Adrian Coyle, “Discourse Analysis,” in *Research Methods in Psychology*, ed. Glynis M. Breakwell et al., 3rd ed (London ; Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2006), 247–49.

⁴⁶ These videos may not have been the original ones which appeared on YouTube. Indeed, in both cases, there are dozens of copies of the videos uploaded by various users. The particular copies that were used in this project were compared with other versions and selected because they did not diverge in any way from other versions that appeared around the same time period and were viewed by tens of thousands of users.

⁴⁷ FEELTHELIGHT, *Her Name Was Nedā*.

rounding her as she falls to the ground. Throughout the video, one man calls her name repeatedly and tells her not to be afraid. At various points at the beginning of the recording, Nedā can be heard saying that she is “burning” in Persian.⁴⁸ Halfway through the video, Nedā’s arms become limp and her eyes begin to roll and stare in the direction of the camera. At this point, screaming of male and female bystanders can be heard in the background. At the end of the recording, blood pours from her mouth and nose as one man attempts to resuscitate her. The video ends abruptly, and it is unclear whether she is alive or dead.

The still image that was made of this video is revealing both in what it shows and in what it does not depict of the event. The moment in the video during which Nedā stares into the camera has been circulated widely in news reports about Iranian election protests.⁴⁹ This moment differs from those preceding and following it because of the clarity of her expressionless face. Nedā shows no pain, and it is unclear whether she is conscious at this moment or not. In this way, this particular image depicts her as helpless and weak, and thus unable to resist an imminent death. In addition to what this image communicates, it also excludes other aspects of her testimony. First, other moments during the video depict her bleeding, expressing her pain or communicating briefly with those surrounding her, which are lost through the perpetuation of this particular still image. Furthermore, unlike the majority of the video in which bystanders can be seen attempting to resuscitate her, this selection shows Nedā alone in a crowd of feet. This particular still image thus creates the impression that Nedā is weak and resigned to her death while silencing her pain and creating the sense that she is isolated and alone in her death.

The image of Dorli Rainey after being hit in the face with pepper spray can be found on photographer Joshua Trujillo’s website. Rainey appears in the centre of this photo. Her face and

⁴⁸ Translations provided by a female interviewee.

⁴⁹ For examples of the use of this image in news reports, see Appendix.

scarf are drenched in a white liquid that is purported to be pepper spray neutralizing fluid.⁵⁰ She stares directly into the camera with a stoic expression on her face. She is standing between two male protestors who appear to be holding her. The protester to her right averts his eyes and wears an expression of disappointment on his face. The other, whose expression is not visible under his goggles, is looking at Rainey, and holding a spray container in his hand. Other protestors are visible behind the three, but they are not in focus and thus their expressions cannot be determined.

Similar to the image of Nedā, this photograph of Rainey is revealing not only in what it communicates about the woman herself, but also in what it omits of her testimony. This image is notable in that Rainey seems to be showing no reaction to the event that has just occurred. It is implicit through the redness of her face and eyes that she is in severe pain, yet her blank expression shows a similar resignation to her fate as the one Nedā reveals in the still image captured in the video of her brutalization. Indeed, Rainey has less emotion visible on her face than the protestor to her right. What is also notable is that this image has received the most attention of all of the images in Trujillo's gallery, which has resulted in a marginalization of the narratives visible in other photos. Trujillo has published a total of 124 photographs from the Occupy Seattle demonstrations, approximately two dozen of which feature skirmishes between protestors and local police forces. Some of them depict arguments between police and protestors, while others feature victims of pepper spray or individuals being physically restrained or forced to the ground by officers. Nevertheless, Rainey's image appears as the title image of this gallery and has been spread more than any of the other photographs in news reports about the clashes between police and protestors in the city. Indeed, this is the only image of the incident that appears in the majority of articles cited in this study.⁵¹ This is all the more curious because other images show individuals who are being physically restrained by of-

⁵⁰ Trujillo, "Occupy Seattle."

⁵¹ See Appendix.

ficers or otherwise in extreme pain.⁵² What the image of Rainey shows that others do not, then, is an individual who appears in pain yet is also stoic. The perpetuation of this particular image thus places the emphasis of the incident in Seattle on a single elderly victim.

A video compilation of footage from the events surrounding the beating of the “girl in the blue bra” shows the incident from moments before the beatings began to the point at which the military officers left Tahrir Square.⁵³ At first, four individuals can be seen running from a crowd of military personnel in riot gear. One, the “girl in the blue bra” falls to the ground, and the other three try to help her stand. Eventually, as the military personnel close in, two of her accomplices run away. The officers surround the “girl” and her male associate and separate them as the two attempt to resist the officers’ use of force. As one officer beats the male protestor, three drag the “girl” a few feet away. As they do so, her *abaya* is ripped open, which then exposes bright blue lingerie. An officer can then be seen kicking the woman in her torso directly below her bra. A second later, as officers move away, another officer covers her exposed torso with her *abaya*. The woman’s body remains limp and immobile. Thereafter, two other bystanders attempt to tend to her as the military personnel retreat. A few officers return and begin beating the bystanders while the “girl in the blue bra” is brought to her feet and subsequently disappears from view.⁵⁴

Similar to the two aforementioned cases, one particular moment in this video began to circulate as a still image in media reports within hours of the video being uploaded to YouTube, thereby minimizing the testimony represented by the rest of the video. Specifically, the image of the brutalized woman that has been most widely circulated is the point at which the “girl in the blue bra’s”

⁵²See, for example, images 24, 31, 83 110, and 121 in Trujillo’s gallery (Trujillo, “Occupy Seattle.”).

⁵³ Hna Fi Hna DZ, *Girl Beaten by Egypt Military*.

⁵⁴ This portion of the video is slightly unclear, but it seems that the “girl in the blue bra” is being escorted away by officers.

abaya is torn open as an officer prepares to kick her in the torso.⁵⁵ This particular moment in the video shows the victim at her most hopeless point: Her arms are forcibly restrained by another officer, her legs are immobile, her face is covered by fabric and her undergarments are exposed as her *abaya* has been ripped open. Furthermore, she is a moment away from receiving a powerful kick in her bare torso. As such, this particular image creates the impression that the “girl in the blue bra” was a helpless victim of the military officers’ brutality. What becomes invisible through the circulation of this still image is the testimony of her male accomplice, who has been beaten next to her throughout the video, and that of the female bystander, who came to her aid and was also severely beaten as a result. In addition, her attempt to defend herself against her beaters is also lost through the circulation of this image. Finally, the most brutal moments of the “girl’s” beating, including the following moment in which another officer steps on her torso, are underemphasized by this still image. Thus, the particular image that has circulated since this video was published emphasizes the “girl in the blue bra’s” weakness, and silences both her attempts at self-defense and the brutalization of others who came to her aid.

The prominence of these three images closely parallels the principles of aesthetic theory, as well as both Agamben’s *Muselmann* and the *femina sacra* as articulated by Lentin. The fact that the images that have circulated of Nedā, Rainey, and the “girl in the blue bra” reveal a narrative of these women as helpless victims, which is not fully supported by other portions of the videos and galleries from which they originated, illustrates that the images do not necessarily depict events as they truly occurred, but rather are, in and of themselves, interpretations of reality. This echoes Shepherd’s claims that photographs are “inherently ambiguous” in their depictions of reality.⁵⁶ Furthermore, the omission of images that produce a conflicting narrative, such as those of Nedā and the “girl in the

⁵⁵ See Appendix for a list of articles featuring this particular still image.

⁵⁶ Shepherd, “Visualising Violence,” 215; Bleiker, “The Aesthetic Turn in International Political Theory,” 513.

blue bra” attempting to save themselves and resist their attackers, parallels the omission of weaponry and combat operations that Heck and Schlag noted in their analysis of the EU’s photographic essay on their involvement in Congo.⁵⁷ The omission of these scenes thus perpetuates the narrative that these women were helpless and innocent when confronted by brutal attackers, which makes their attackers look even more inexcusable. Similar to Heck and Schlag’s analysis, the use of one particular image at the exclusion of others helps reinforce a narrative of police or paramilitary brutality. Moreover, this questionable reduction of these incidents to three single images serves to illustrate Agamben’s assertion that the testimonies of complete witnesses are prone to chronic misinterpretation.⁵⁸ Furthermore, Lentin’s assertion that women’s testimonies are likely to be recast in such a way that makes the victims appear particularly helpless, fragile, and subject to brutality is particularly relevant in these cases.⁵⁹ Indeed, the “iconic” images of Nedā, Rainey, and the “girl in the blue bra” all show these women at particularly vulnerable moments while minimizing both their examples of resistance and the more brutal images of them and other demonstrators. In this way, the complete testimonies of these *feminae sacrae* are excluded through the very inclusion of these photographic renditions of their stories.

⁵⁷ Heck and Schlag, “Imagining Europe’s Security Engagement in Africa,” 19.

⁵⁸ Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 35–37.

⁵⁹ Lentin, “*Femina Sacra*,” 466.

Chapter 3: Newspaper narratives as incomplete witnesses

Lentin's assertion that narratives of brutality can detract from the testimony of *feminae sacrae* can be applied to the cases of Nedā, Rainey, and the "girl in the blue bra" by examining the newspaper articles that appeared in the month following their attacks. In this chapter, I engage in a discourse analysis of American newspaper reports surrounding these three events to explore the ways in which the three women's testimonies been further marginalized through their inclusion in American print media narratives.

The methodology employed for this section of my investigation resembled that which was used for the analysis of the three images detailed in Chapter 2. After performing a discourse analysis on the photographs, videos, and still images from the three events, I examined the newspaper articles that appeared in three American newspapers for approximately one month after the events occurred using Potter and Wetherell's method. I narrowed my focus to *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, and *The Washington Post* because they are three of the six most widely-read newspapers within the United States.⁶⁰ These newspapers were ideal because they represent a spectrum of political opinions: *The Wall Street Journal* has a reputation as a conservative newspaper, *The New York Times* is widely considered to be left-of-centre in its political stance, and *The Washington Post* is known as strongly left-leaning.⁶¹ Articles appearing within a one-month time period following the incidents were chosen in an attempt to understand the more immediate aftermath and impressions that surrounded these events rather than the more long-term reflections that would be evident over a longer

⁶⁰ The New Audit Bureau of Circulations, *Total Circulation for the Six Months Ended: 9/30/2012* (New York: Alliance for Audited Media, September 30, 2013), n.p., <http://abcas3.auditedmedia.com/ecirc/newstitlesearchus.asp>.

⁶¹ David Carr, "The Media Equation: Under Murdock, Tilting Rightward at The Journal," *The New York Times*, December 13, 2009, sec. Media and Advertising, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/14/business/media/14carr.html?_r=0; *New York Times, Washington Post, and Local Newspapers Seen as Having Liberal Bias* (Online: Rasmussen Reports, July 15, 2007), http://www.rasmussenreports.com/public_content/politics/current_events/general_current_events/media/new_york_times_washington_post_and_local_newspapers_seen_as_having_liberal_bias.

time period. As the focus of this portion of the study was on the particular discourse that surrounded the photographs themselves, articles that did not include a copy of the photograph were excluded from the study, as were articles that appeared in the Opinion section of the newspapers.⁶² In total, twenty-three articles were included in this study: Ten addressed the events surrounding Nedā's death, seven reported on the aftermath of the protests in Cairo during which the "girl in the blue bra" was beaten, and six recounted the events in Seattle that occurred the night Trujillo photographed Rainey.⁶³

The articles that detail the life and death of Nedā primarily focus on her lack of political involvement. The articles that characterize Nedā as a passive victim frequently refer to a statement made by her fiancé in an interview with the Persian *BBC* news network. In this interview, he mentioned briefly that she did not have strong opinions in favor of or against the Iranian political system, but instead wished for a "better world" for everyone. The articles that cite this particular interview interpret this statement to mean that Nedā was an apolitical victim who was thus shot without reason.⁶⁴ One article, on the other hand, does not categorize Nedā as apolitical. In this article, it is suggested that her presence at Iranian election protests and her "modern" dress signified her courage to resist the theocratic regime.⁶⁵ Although this one article makes clear that Nedā's presence at the Iranian election protests can be interpreted in more than one way, the majority of the articles

⁶² Although it could be argued that Opinion pieces contribute substantially to discursive constructions of other societies, the sheer number of letters to the editor and Opinion blogs for these events was overwhelming (including these articles would have raised the total number of articles examined from thirty to over seventy). Furthermore, it became apparent after reading a few Opinion columns that these articles did not present a particular discursive construction that differed from news articles – they instead exaggerated ones that were more subtly addressed in other sources.

⁶³ A list of the articles used in this study appears in the Appendix of this report.

⁶⁴ Nazila Fathi, "In A Death Seen Around the World, a Symbol of Iranian Protests," *The New York Times*, June 22, 2009, sec. World, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/23/world/middleeast/23neda.html>; Randy Cohen, "Neda, Obama and the Power of Pictures," *The New York Times*, June 29, 2009, <http://ethicist.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/06/29/the-power-of-pictures/>.

⁶⁵ Sudarsan Raghavan, "Role of Women In Iran Protest Kindles Hope," *The Washington Post*, June 28, 2009, sec. World, http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2009-06-28/world/36847335_1_female-protesters-Neda-agma-soltan-iranian-women.

that appeared in these three newspapers nevertheless depict her as ambivalent toward the protests and the Iranian government.

A number of articles that mention her death instead focus more attention on the violent nature of the Iranian regime generally and the election protests more specifically. These articles repeatedly concentrate on the increasing brutality in Tehran and the government's attempt to prohibit public mourning of Nedā and other casualties. In these articles, words such as "cruel," "agonizing," "violent" and "dirty" are used to describe the events surrounding her death. In addition, two articles refer to the regime's insistence that the video of Nedā was staged in an attempt to discredit the Iranian government.⁶⁶ The implication of such statements is that the regime responded to Nedā's death callously. Furthermore, a number of articles draw cultural inferences from Nedā's attack. In one article, it is suggested that a repressive Iranian culture necessarily yields to the sort of violence that Nedā experienced, and demonstrates that such brutality was common during the Iranian Revolution of 1979. Another article suggests that state-sanctioned violence has been a common feature of Iranian politics in recent decades.⁶⁷ The implication of these articles is that Nedā's death occurred because of deeply embedded cultural and political tendencies toward violence against protestors in Iran.

Finally, articles that do not directly focus on the brutality of the Iranian regime instead concentrate on American President Barack Obama's response to the video and his shifting foreign policy toward the country. Many of the articles mention that, prior to this incident, Obama had been

⁶⁶ Thomas Erdbrink, "Woman's Slaying In Protests Creates An Opposition Icon," *The Washington Post*, June 23, 2009, sec. World, http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2009-06-23/world/36789648_1_neda-gha-soltan-mir-hosseini-mousavi-theocratic-government; Fathi, "Symbol of Iranian Protests"; Thomas Erdbrink and William Branigin, "Iranian Cleric Calls for 'Ruthless' Punishment of Protest Leaders," *The Washington Post*, June 27, 2009, sec. World, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/06/26/AR2009062600463.html?sid=ST2009062504596>; Thomas Erdbrink, "Violence Breaks Out in Streets of Tehran," *The Washington Post*, July 31, 2009, sec. World, http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2009-07-31/world/36913037_1_mousavi-and-mehdi-karroubi-riot-police-mir-hosseini-mousavi; Margaret Coker and Roshanak Taghavi, "Iran Dismisses Vote-Fraud Claims," *The Wall Street Journal*, June 30, 2009, sec. World, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB124626597362067533.html>.

⁶⁷ Raghavan, "Role of Women in Protest"; Fathi, "Symbol of Iranian Protests."

criticized for his lack of response to the Iranian election protests, while some articles clearly suggest that a tougher stance toward Iran is necessary in light of evidence that the regime is sanctioning the murder of its own people.⁶⁸ These articles thus use the death of Nedā as a starting point to launch into a discussion of the failure of American foreign policy toward Iran.

Rainey was a central focus of all six articles that used her picture and recounted the incident in Seattle, yet the personal details about her that were emphasized in these articles serve to minimize her experiences as an activist. All six articles accurately reported her age at the time of the incident, and five articles included her name.⁶⁹ One of the articles even reports her as being five feet tall.⁷⁰ This focus on her biometric data contrasts with the attention paid to her former activism. Only one of the articles used in this project identified her as a “longtime activist” who was a former resistor in her native Austria during the former Nazi occupation.⁷¹ Considering that either her name or age was reported in all articles, and that Rainey has a significant online presence including a once popular blog and several videos of her work at demonstrations, this lack of focus on her activism cannot be attributed to a paucity of information surrounding her personal details.⁷² Instead, it appears that her activism is not as salient of an issue to those who reported on her photo. This lack of attention to her resistance efforts is further illustrated in one article which reports on an email interview she conducted with an independent Seattle newspaper. In her email, she explains her reasons for being

⁶⁸ Cohen, “Power of Pictures”; Jay Solomon, Jonathan Weisman, and Yochi J. Dreazen, “Obama Rips Iran in Tactical Shift,” *The Wall Street Journal*, June 24, 2009, sec. World, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB124575867345041295.html>; Glenn Kessler, “Obama Steps Up Criticism of Iran’s Crackdown on Election Protests,” *The Washington Post*, June 24, 2009, sec. World, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/story/2009/06/23/ST2009062301746.html>.

⁶⁹ See Appendix for a list of these articles.

⁷⁰ Elizabeth Flock, “Occupy Wall Street Cops: It’s Not All Police Brutality,” *The Washington Post*, November 16, 2011, sec. World, http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/blogpost/post/occupy-wall-street-cops-its-not-all-police-brutality/2011/11/16/gIQAEMgURN_blog.html.

⁷¹ Bell, “Dorli Rainey, New Face of Occupy.”

⁷² Dorli Rainey, “About the Old Lady,” Blog, *Old Lady in Combat Boots*, n.d., http://www.oldladyincombatboots.com/?page_id=2; talkingsticktv, Network X - The Case for Impeachment, Digital (Seattle, USA: Talking Stick TV, 2003), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gFzcqPZp5xw; talkingsticktv, TalkingStickTV - Dorli Rainey - Longtime Seattle Activist>, Digital (Seattle, USA: Talking Stick TV, 2010), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DSi09gLmX5Q>.

involved in the protests and her opinions about the Occupy movement. She also briefly recounts the police's use of physical force and pepper spray against protestors, and mentions that after being hit with pepper spray, she was aided by an Iraq war veteran.⁷³ In the article reporting on this email, attention is only paid to the latter two points of her email, and her motivations for involvement in the protest are excluded.⁷⁴ Thus, although these six articles all correctly identify Rainey and some of her personal history the focus shifts away from her activism and toward her helplessness during the Seattle protests.

Similar to the articles surrounding Nedā's attack, several articles also focus on the inappropriate behaviour of Seattle police toward Rainey and other Occupy protestors rather than on Rainey's experiences. Two articles reference the Seattle Police Department's assertion that pepper spray was a legitimate weapon in this circumstance because the confrontation between protestors and police had become violent. In the first article, an officer is quoted as saying that pepper spray is "no more dangerous to someone who is ten than someone who is eighty," which seems to be an almost implicit justification on his behalf for pepper spraying children and elderly citizens.⁷⁵ In the second article, officers report that it was necessary to use pepper spray because the demonstrators were provoking them, though, according to the article, there was no evidence this was in fact the case.⁷⁶ Furthermore, two articles mention that Seattle mayor Mike McGinn apologized for the use of pepper spray against protestors.⁷⁷ A final article details the history of the use of pepper spray as a

⁷³ Dominic Holden, "Dorli Rainey, 84, Pepper Sprayed by SPD at Occupy Seattle Protest," *The Stranger*, November 15, 2011, sec. Occupy, <http://slog.thestranger.com/slog/archives/2011/11/15/dorli-rainey-84-pepper-sprayed-by-spd-at-occupy-seattle-protest>.

⁷⁴ Robert Mackey, "Pepper Spray and Ayn Rand Deployed Against Occupy Seattle Protesters," *The New York Times*, November 16, 2011, sec. World, <http://thelede.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/11/16/pepper-spray-and-ayn-rand-deployed-against-occupy-seattle-protesters/>.

⁷⁵ Flock, "Occupy Cops: Not All Brutality."

⁷⁶ Mackey, "Pepper Spray Deployed."

⁷⁷ Bell, "Dorli Rainey, New Face of Occupy"; Jillian Dunham, "#OccupyWallSt Roundup, Day 62," *The New York Times*, November 18, 2011, sec. US News, <http://cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/11/18/occupywallst-roundup-day-62>.

weapon, and highlights that it is dangerous and thus highly controversial.⁷⁸ These articles create the impression that the use of pepper spray was a particularly violent and unjustifiable act committed by local police during the Seattle protests.

In all seven articles that used the image of the “girl in the blue bra,” the majority of attention focuses not on the victim, but instead on the actions of the police toward her. All articles correctly state that the “girl” was dragged, kicked and beaten in Tahrir Square. However, five of the seven articles state that the woman had been “stripped” by police.⁷⁹ Only two of the seven articles report that it is unclear from the video whether the “girl” had been forcibly stripped or whether her *abaya* had unintentionally fallen off while she was dragged.⁸⁰ Two texts refer to the “girl” as being “supine” while she was dragged and another reports that she may have been unconscious at the time events occurred.⁸¹ Furthermore, two articles refer to the “girl” as being “humiliated” and “exposed” as a result of this public beating.⁸² Although the majority of these articles speculate that the “girl in the blue bra’s” *abaya* was forcibly removed by police and that she was too humiliated by the event to publicly identify herself, none of these articles speculated that she may have been an activist or re-

⁷⁸ Katharine Q. Seelye, “Pepper Spray’s Fallout, from Crowd Control to Mocking Images,” *The New York Times*, November 22, 2011, sec. US News, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/23/us/pepper-sprays-fallout-from-crowd-control-to-mocking-images.html?_r=0.

⁷⁹ Matt Bradley, “Egyptian Military’s Credibility Is at Stake,” *The Wall Street Journal*, December 19, 2011, sec. Middle East, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052970204058404577106452185060554.html#articleTabs%3Darticle>; Matt Bradley, “Police Clash With Cairo Protesters,” *The Wall Street Journal*, December 18, 2011, sec. Middle East, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052970204553904577104190363673720.html#articleTabs%3Darticle>; David D. Kirkpatrick, “Tahrir Square, Walled In,” *The New York Times*, December 23, 2011, sec. World, <http://thelede.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/12/23/tahrir-square-walled-in/>; David D. Kirkpatrick, “Egypt’s Women Find Power Still Hinges on Men,” *The New York Times*, January 9, 2012, sec. Middle East, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/10/world/middleeast/egyptian-women-confront-restrictions-of-patriarchy.html>; David D. Kirkpatrick, “Mass March by Cairo Women in Protest Over Abuse by Soldiers,” *The New York Times*, December 20, 2011, sec. Middle East, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/21/world/middleeast/violence-enters-5th-day-as-egyptian-general-blames-protesters.html>.

⁸⁰ Mackey, “Women’s March in Cairo”; Matt Bradley, “Egyptian Women March, Decry Abuse by Military,” *The Wall Street Journal*, December 21, 2011, sec. Middle East, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052970204791104577110610803461718.html>.

⁸¹ Kirkpatrick, “Mass March by Cairo Women”; Bradley, “Egyptian Women March”; Mackey, “Women’s March in Cairo.” As was previously mentioned, the “girl in the blue bra” appears to stand and walk away with police at the end of the video depicting the incident, so the reference to her being unconscious is particularly curious.

⁸² Kirkpatrick, “Mass March by Cairo Women”; Kirkpatrick, “Egypt’s Women Find Power Still Hinges on Men.”

sistant to the military regime. The focus of these articles, then, is clearly on the “girl’s” passivity and inability to defend herself against the military officers instead of on her possible agency and resistance to police forces.

As was also the case for the articles surrounding Nedā’s death, the second major focus of the articles used in this study was on the sexism and brutality of the Egyptian military and society. Many articles referred to the military as “violent” and “brutal” toward protestors.⁸³ Two of these articles use the story of the “girl in the blue bra” as a strong example of the military’s sexist and violent treatment of women.⁸⁴ However, another two articles do not associate the beating of the “girl” as an example of the military’s sexism *per se*, but rather as an example of an underlying patriarchal culture that rejects women’s involvement in the public sphere.⁸⁵ These articles suggest that women’s political involvement in Egypt has been stifled for generations, and that their involvement in the Arab Spring was met with hostility by male protestors as well as the military.⁸⁶ In all of these articles, then, the story of the “girl in the blue bra” thus becomes marginalized as the greater focus remains on the violence of the military and Egypt’s patriarchal culture.

The newspaper articles surrounding these three events demonstrate not only the principles of aesthetic theory, but also Agamben’s assertions that the *Muselmann*’s testimony becomes marginalized through its retelling by incomplete witnesses, and Masters’s and Lentin’s claims that women’s testimonies tend to be reduced to conventional stereotypes of women as passive and fragile. First, the impact of these images on newspaper depictions of Nedā, Rainey, and the “girl in the blue bra”

⁸³ See, for example, Mackey, “Women’s March in Cairo”; Bradley, “Police Clash with Protestors”; Bradley, “Credibility at Stake.”

⁸⁴ Kirkpatrick, “Mass March by Cairo Women”; Kirkpatrick, “Egypt’s Women Find Power Still Hinges on Men.”

⁸⁵ Kirkpatrick, “Tahrir Square, Walled In”; Bradley, “Egyptian Women March.”

⁸⁶ Although the focus of this paper is not on the veracity of the news reports, but rather on what the reports suggested about Egyptian society, it is important to note that this assertion is certainly questionable because it ignores the history of nineteenth- and twentieth-century female activists in Egypt during periods of British colonialism, military occupation and totalitarian rule. (Margot Badran, “Competing Agenda: Feminists, Islam and the State in Nineteenth- and Twentieth Century Egypt,” in *Global Feminisms Since 1945: Rewriting Histories*, ed. Bonnie G. Smith (New York: Routledge, 2000), 13–43.)

exemplifies Bleiker's assertions that imagery does not reflect reality but rather serves to perpetuate discursive constructions of political events or actors.⁸⁷ The heavy focus on Obama's shifting foreign policy and the brutality of the Iranian paramilitary forces and culture in the articles surrounding Nedā's death, the concentration on the controversial use of pepper spray in the Occupy Seattle movement in the articles referring to Rainey, and the focus on the patriarchal nature of the Egyptian military and society in the articles about the "girl in the blue bra" all demonstrate how the use of an image of a brutalized individual can draw more attention to the society in which she was attacked rather than to the individual's experiences and reactions to the events. In addition, the focus in the articles of these three women as victims rather than as potential or actual activists demonstrates Agamben's claim that the testimony of a complete witness is marginalized through his story's retelling by others: The three women have been described in *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Washington Post* as "humiliated," "distressed," and are characterized not simply as innocent and undeserving of the treatment they received, but as helpless and docile toward their attackers, even though their testimonies as revealed through the images of their attacks suggest that this is only one possible interpretation of the incidents.⁸⁸ Moreover, the specific characterization of these women as passive victims closely parallels Lentin's position that narratives of women subjected to violence tend to focus excessively on their fragility, vulnerability, and passivity.⁸⁹ The narratives of these three women furthermore echo Masters's reading of the news reports that circulated following Jessica Lynch's rescue at the beginning of the American occupation of Iraq, in which Masters asserts that Lynch's competence as a soldier was marginalized as she was reduced to a victim in need of saving by military personnel.⁹⁰ Ultimately, it is evident that the interpretations of these three "iconic" images provided in American newspaper articles surrounding the incidents in Tehran, Seattle, and Cairo

⁸⁷ Bleiker, "The Aesthetic Turn in International Political Theory," 511–13.

⁸⁸ Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 33–37.

⁸⁹ Lentin, "Femina Sacra," 466.

⁹⁰ Masters, "Femina Sacra," 36.

have not necessarily represented the events as they truly occurred, but have rather served as representations of the events that ultimately marginalize the victims' narratives by their very inclusion.

Chapter 4: Survivors as incomplete witnesses

Lentin's assertion that survivors' recollections of atrocities can marginalize the testimonies of *feminae sacrae* can be applied to the cases of Nedā, Rainey, and the "girl in the blue bra" by examining how interviewees from the cities in which these three events occurred remember the women and their attacks.⁹¹ In this chapter, I report on unstructured interviews I conducted with locals living in Tehran, Cairo, and Seattle at the time of these incidents to explore the extent to which these women's testimonies have been further marginalized as particular aspects of their testimonies have been exaggerated or forgotten since the events took place.

In order to investigate the ongoing impact that the images of Nedā, Rainey, and the "girl in the blue bra" have had on those who were exposed to them, I conducted unstructured interviews with locals who were living in their respective countries at the time the events occurred. My goal in these interviews was to allow individuals to speak as freely as possible about the events they remembered seeing and hearing about and through this to determine which aspects of the stories that circulated about these women remain salient in retrospect. I limited interviews to individuals who had been living in their respective countries during the time that the protests occurred in an attempt to understand local reactions to the protests. For each set of interviews, I contacted people who were friends of a mutual friend. I avoided contacting individuals who I knew personally in an attempt to avoid an association bias: Individuals who were personal friends of mine may have been too limited in terms of geographical spread and political orientation to gain meaningful insights into how the

⁹¹ The equation of "interviewees" with "survivors" may seem to be a misappropriation of Lentin's assertions. On the one hand, her use of the word "survivor" in this portion of her paper specifically referred to those who had experienced the holocaust and had survived to recount their events to others. However, Lentin herself emphasizes within her article that "Holocaust survivors" can take many forms, and are not only those who experienced the horrors of concentration camps. As such, it does not appear to be an unreasonable extension of her concept to apply the term "survivor" in this project to locals who were familiar with these three protest movements. See Lentin, "*Femina Sacra*," 464–68.

three events have been remembered.⁹² However, I also avoided a random sampling of individuals. As the events in question were politically sensitive issues, it became necessary to establish trust by being introduced through a mutual friend.⁹³ As a result, I was only able to work with people who spoke English fluently, and the majority of those I interviewed were either current students or recent university graduates. Although this may limit the scope of opinions and insights I was exposed to, the fact that the majority of participants in the Green Revolution, the Arab Spring, and the Occupy Movement were university students and youth under thirty suggests that this particular range of opinions was a reasonable focus.⁹⁴ Furthermore, since these images spread primarily through social media, and youth are the primary consumers of social media, a limited focus on this age group seemed appropriate.⁹⁵

Interviews were conducted either in person or with video conferencing software. The reason that interviews were not done through an email exchange or a telephone connection without video software was because I considered it essential to fully engage with interviewees not only through listening to them, but also by seeing their physical reactions to events they remembered, and allowing me to see my reactions to their statements.⁹⁶ As video conferencing software is frequently subject to

⁹² The tendency of individuals to associate with like-minded people is a well-established sociological phenomenon. (Paul Felix Lazarsfeld and Robert King Merton, "Friendship as a Social Process: A Substantive and Methodological Analysis," in *Freedom and Control in Modern Society*, ed. Morroe Berger, Theodore Abel, and Charles Page H. (New York: Van Nostrand, 1954), 63.)

⁹³ This became particularly important during my interviews with individuals from Iran. In spite of the fact that I was personally introduced to several interviewees by a mutual friend, a few became skeptical of my motivations and declined to participate.

⁹⁴ "The Demographics of Occupy Wall Street: By the Numbers," *The Week*, October 20, 2011, para. 4, <http://theweek.com/article/index/220529/the-demographics-of-occupy-wall-street-by-the-numbers>; Leyla Ferani, "Iran Can No Longer Suppress Its Youth," *The Telegraph*, June 15, 2009, sec. Opinion, para. 15, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/personal-view/5543122/Iran-can-no-longer-suppress-its-youth.html>; Michael Slackman, "Bullets Stall Youthful Push for Arab Spring," *The New York Times*, March 17, 2011, sec. World, para. 6–8, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/18/world/middleeast/18youth.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0.

⁹⁵ Jeffrey S. Juris, "Reflections on #Occupy Everywhere: Social Media, Public Space, and Emerging Logics of Aggregation," *American Ethnologist* 39, no. 2 (2012): 261; Lev Grossman, "Iran Protests: Twitter, the Medium of the Movement," *Time Magazine* 17 (2009): para. 3–4; Jeffrey Ghannam, "Social Media in the Arab World: Leading up to the Uprisings of 2011," *Center for International Media Assistance/National Endowment for Democracy* 3 (2011): 4.

⁹⁶ The advantages of conducting interviews face-to-face have been cited by a number of scholars, such as Dille, Schostak and Beck. One of the main benefits cited by these individuals is that it is easier to build rapport with individu-

delays, however, I conducted in-person interviews when possible. I was able to conduct interviews with individuals from Seattle and Iran who were living in proximity to me during the period in which I was conducting interviews. I was also able to travel to Egypt to interview locals who had been present during the protests. The ability to travel to Egypt to conduct interviews was ideal: Not only were the interviews in person, but they afforded the opportunity for me to engage with individuals within their own country in locations that they were familiar with.⁹⁷ Although it would have been optimal to conduct interviews in Seattle and Tehran, the political volatility of Iran and the distance between Seattle and my location made this impractical. In a further attempt to create a more relaxed environment, interviews were conducted on the condition of anonymity, and notes were taken during the interview when the interviewee consented. Furthermore, when interviews were conducted in person, the interviewee was given the opportunity to choose the location so that they could feel more in control of the discussion.⁹⁸ In total, I interviewed fourteen individuals, six of whom were from Cairo, four of whom were from Seattle, and four of whom were from Tehran. The remainder of this chapter details the results of this empirical investigation.

Nedā remains in the memories of those who were living in Tehran at the time of the 2009 election protests as a symbol of innocence and martyrdom. The four individuals from Tehran who were interviewed for this project remembered her name and some of the circumstances surrounding her death. When asked about Nedā and the video that depicted her after she had been shot, though, three of the four individuals recounted the events surrounding her death rather than the video itself. When asked to recount the events depicted in the video, all interviewees reported that Nedā had

als through a face-to-face interaction rather than by telephone or in writing. (Susan E. Beck, *Practical Research Methods for Librarians and Information Professionals*, ed. Kate Manuel (New York: Neal-Schuman Publishers, 2008), 86–87; Patrick Dille, “Conducting Successful Interviews: Tips for Intrepid Research,” *Theory into Practice* 39, no. 3 (2000): 133–34; John F. Schostak, *Interviewing and Representation in Qualitative Research* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2006), 56.)

⁹⁷ Schostak, *Interviewing and Representation in Qualitative Research*, 53–54.

⁹⁸ According to Schostak, the condition of anonymity and allowing an individual to select a location of an interview are not only necessary for ethical considerations, but also allow a person to feel more in control of a conversation and thus more open to discussing more controversial opinions or topics. (*Ibid.*, 53.)

watched the protests but not participated, and that she had been shot by a *basij*, a volunteer police officer, even though these events were not depicted in the video of her attack. Furthermore, three interviewees emphasized not only the cruelty of the *basij*, but also of the Iranian regime that refused to allow her family to hold a public burial for Nedā after her death. This stood out to the interviewees as particularly heinous because, they explained, a proper burial is of prime importance to the Iranian *shi'a* community. Furthermore, interviewees did not recall the moment at which Nedā stares into the camera, but instead recounted the moment at which she began to bleed at the end of the video. The final recollection that interviewees repeatedly emphasized was that Nedā was innocent. They stressed that she had not been involved in the protests and had done nothing against the Iranian regime to warrant being shot. Two interviewees, themselves both participants in the protests, also characterized her as a “martyr” of the election protests because she was shot in spite of her innocence. The impressions that thus remain of Nedā are of her as an innocent bystander and a victim of a brutal police force and merciless regime.

The four interviewees could also recall a handful of other demonstrators and bystanders who had been killed by *basij* or other state-sanctioned military and paramilitary forces. In fact, only one of the interviewees, a female who had not been involved in the protests, mentioned Nedā first when asked about examples of brutality during the protests. The interviewees were able to recount other stories of tortured and executed prisoners or university students who had been shot – and one male interviewee also mentioned that a close personal friend of his had been killed in a prison two years after being arrested by Iranian police forces. Interviewees mentioned that they were aware that these stories had not received the same amount of attention internationally as the story of Nedā. They did not suggest that this was the case because her death was more brutal than other protestors’, but that her innocence made this story more remarkable. Thus, amongst those interviewed for this project,

the prevailing conception of Nedā today remains of an innocent bystander who stands out because of the state's unwarranted cruelty toward her.

Similar to the events surrounding the death of Nedā, Rainey's humiliation and innocence remained more salient than her activism and resistance to Seattle police forces in the minds of the individuals I interviewed. Three of the four interviewees, two of whom had been involved in the Occupy Seattle protests but had not participated in this particular event, recalled Trujillo's photograph of Rainey after being hit with pepper spray. However, interviewees did not mention the events spontaneously: They recalled the events only after being asked if they remembered any examples of police brutality during the Occupy Seattle protests, and one only recalled the event after considering the question for a few minutes. When asked what the photograph depicted, interviewees responded that they remembered she was an elderly woman who had been hit with a large amount pepper spray. Interviewees did not recall Rainey's name or her history of activism, and they also could not remember that protestors had been hit with pepper spray on this particular occasion because of a confrontation occurring after protestors were forced to move out of a local park. In addition, two of those interviews recalled that the picture depicted Rainey covered in pepper spray, even though the picture actually depicted her covered with pepper spray neutralizing fluid. In this way, their recollection of the photo was that it showed Rainey in greater pain than she actually was at the time.⁹⁹ When asked about other examples of police brutality or overuse of pepper spray in Seattle, interviewees could not recall any other events aside from this one, and they could not remember any of Trujillo's other photographs. Interviewees' recollections of the photograph of Rainey thus concentrated primarily the pain she experienced, and did not focus on her history of activism or involvement in the Occupy Seattle Movement.

⁹⁹ In an interview with Keith Olbermann, Rainey mentioned that the neutralizing spray had helped relieve the pain of the pepper spray that was used on her before the photo was taken. (Bell, "Dorli Rainey, New Face of Occupy.")

One issue that was repeatedly mentioned during interviews with individuals living in Seattle at the time of the Occupy Movement was that local police forces had a reputation for brutal behavior, especially toward poor and immigrant communities. This was a particularly notable finding because none of the newspaper articles used in this study mentioned the reputation of Seattle police forces. All interviewees, in contrast, mentioned that Seattle's police officers have frequently come under scrutiny for their gratuitous use of force against citizens in the past few decades, and that the use of pepper spray against Occupy protestors was disappointing, yet unsurprising. In this way, the image of Rainey covered with pepper spray neutralizing fluid reminded interviewees of the history of local police brutality in Seattle, and shifted attention away from her particular experiences to a disappointment in the police forces more generally, thus paralleling the news reports of police brutality in Tehran and Cairo during the protest movements in 2009 and 2011.

Interviews with Egyptians living in Cairo in October 2011 revealed a similar perception of the "girl in the blue bra" as a passive victim of brutality. All interviewees remembered the "girl in the blue bra" when asked. However, as was also the case in my interviews with individuals from Tehran and Seattle, this was not the most salient example of police brutality that most interviewees remembered. Most interviewees recounted other stories of protestors being shot or forcibly removed from demonstration areas before mentioning the case of the "girl in the blue bra." When asked what the video of the "girl" depicted, all interviewees remembered that her clothing had been ripped open after she had been surrounded by officers who then beat her. Interviewees did not typically recount other scenes in the video in which the "girl" was helped by other protestors who were subsequently beaten themselves, or the point at which an officer covered the "girl's" torso with her ripped *abaya*. When asked why this particular event had become so significant within Egypt, interviewees typically emphasized that it was the inappropriateness of the officers' behavior and the sheer novelty of this event. One female interviewee who had been involved in the protests mentioned that she was not

aware of similar events occurring either prior or subsequent to this incident. Another female interviewee who had not been involved in the protests, in contrast, maintained that such events were common during the Arab Spring protests, citing the forced virginity tests executed by military forces earlier that year as a case in point.¹⁰⁰ Interviewees also depicted this event as “shameful” for the military because exposing a woman in this way is contradictory to Egyptian culture. Furthermore, the event was described primarily as “humiliating” for the victim, who was criticized in the following weeks by more conservative newspapers for drawing too much attention to herself through wearing suggestive clothing. The reactions of interviewees thus demonstrated that, regardless of whether these events were common or not during the Arab Spring in Egypt, the “girl in the blue bra” is primarily remembered for her humiliation and victimization.

A few interviewees mentioned that the reason the story of the “girl in the blue bra” remains in Egyptians’ memories is because of the use of cartoon imagery, which is still visible in some parts of Cairo, to commemorate the events that took place during the revolution. Two interviewees provided cartoons of the “girl in the blue bra” to show how she is remembered through drawings. One of these cartoons depicts the same still image of the “girl” being held by officers with her *abaya* ripped open that appeared in newspaper articles following the events. Curiously, this image is almost identical to the still image except for the officer’s shoes: While the officer who stepped on the “girl in the blue bra” in the video of the event was wearing tennis shoes, the officer in the cartoon is wearing military boots.¹⁰¹ This cartoon, then, depicts the event as even more violent than it truly was. In addition, three cartoons concentrated most heavily on the novelty of the “girl’s” bra. One image, which could still be seen on one city wall near Tahrir Square, depicted a blue bra with the words

¹⁰⁰ This incident is recounted in detail in Kirkpatrick, “Egypt’s Women Find Power Still Hinges on Men.”

¹⁰¹ Picture can be seen in HKearl, “One Year Later: Honor ‘The Girl with the Blue Bra’ and Others Like Her,” Blog, *Stop Street Harassment*, December 17, 2012, <http://www.stopstreetharassment.org/2012/12/honorbluebra/>.

“end the system” written in Arabic below.¹⁰² Two other cartoons depicted a woman wearing a blue bra in a position of power: One shows her as a cartoon super hero whose signature costume includes a blue bra, the other portrays her with her *abaya* lifted while she kicks an officer in the face.¹⁰³ The use of the blue bra in these images to identify this incident reveals that her exposure is one of the most enduring aspects of the story surrounding her brutalization.

Interviews with locals present in Tehran, Seattle, and Cairo at the time these events occurred further confirm the principle of aesthetic theory that imagery can reinforce dominant political narratives.¹⁰⁴ In all three sets of interviews, individuals recounted the actions and behavior of police in both these particular events and in the protest movements more generally while overlooking the possible or actual activism of these three women. The focus of Nedā interviewees was on her innocence. Likewise, none of the interviewees from Seattle remembered Rainey’s history of involvement in protest movements, and interviewees did not refer to the “girl in the blue bra” as an activist. Instead, interviewees frequently viewed these events as microcosms of an undercurrent of police brutality and state-sanctioned violence. Nedā’s death was seen as an example of the Iranian regime’s gratuitous violence, and Rainey’s attack served as an example of the brutality of the Seattle police that locals had become accustomed to. Similarly, the incident with the “girl in the blue bra” was remembered as an example of how the Egyptian military was excessively violent toward protestors toward the end of the demonstrations. The focus away from the victims and their attacks and toward a discussion of political narratives reinforces the claims of Shepherd and Bleiker that imagery serves as a form of discourse that can form and reinforce dominant constructions of political actors and events.

¹⁰² Translation provided by an interviewee.

¹⁰³ Picture can be seen in Brandon Letsinger, “The Creation of a Revolutionary Icon,” Blog, *Brandon Letsinger Writes*, April 24, 2012, <http://letsingerwrites.com/2012/04/24/the-creation-of-a-revolutionary-icon/>.

¹⁰⁴ Shepherd, “Visualising Violence,” 215; Bleiker, “The Aesthetic Turn in International Political Theory,” 513.

The interviews also further show that the testimonies of Nedā, Rainey, and the “girl in the blue bra” have been marginalized through their retelling as these women have been reduced to fragile and apolitical victims. First, it is notable that interviewees in all three cases remembered the events as more brutal than the still images of their attacks would suggest: Nedā was remembered bleeding profusely rather than staring into a camera, Rainey was remembered as being covered in pepper spray rather than neutralizing fluid, and the “girl in the blue bra” was remembered through cartoons as being stepped on with a heavy boot rather than a tennis shoe. This reflects not only Agamben’s claim that the *Muselmann*’s true and complete testimony becomes lost as his story is retold, but also strongly resembles Masters’s conceptualization of Lynch as a *femina sacra*.¹⁰⁵ Just as a dramatized version of her rescue in an Iraqi prison characterized her as more of a victim of gratuitous violence than she in fact was, interviews with individuals living in Tehran, Seattle, and Cairo during the time that the three women of this study were attacked similarly revealed that the women are remembered as having suffered greatly – and perhaps more than they in fact had – at the hands of state-sanctioned officers. Nedā, Rainey, and the “girl in the blue bra” therefore resemble *feminae sacrae* as their complete testimonies have been transformed in such a way that renders them victims of extreme brutality in the memories of those who heard their stories when the incidents occurred.

¹⁰⁵ Masters, “*Femina Sacra*,” 36; Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 35–37.

Conclusion

This paper sought to address the question of how, and to what extent, the act of publicizing the attacks on Nedā, Rainey, and the “girl in the blue bra” has silenced their testimonies. By examining the images and newspaper articles surrounding these three incidents, as well as the testimonies of locals familiar with these events, it has become apparent that the stories of these three women have all been marginalized through the circulation of images surrounding their attacks. While the particular still images depicting their attacks reinforce the perspective that these women were passive and resigned to their fates, the American newspaper articles that circulated in the month following their attacks minimize the women’s capacity for activism and resistance to those who brutalized them and to the regimes that allowed the events to occur. Furthermore, the narratives of these incidents recorded in American print media pay more attention to dominant narratives of police brutality, state-sanctioned violence, and cultural tendencies toward patriarchy and cruelty instead of toward the backgrounds and experiences of the victims themselves. Finally, local interviewees continue to remember the events surrounding the women’s brutal treatment more than the women themselves, and believe the images of their attacks as having been more violent than they necessarily were. In lieu of the complete testimonies of Nedā, Rainey, and the “girl in the blue bra,” what remains instead is thus an impression of these women as passive victims of gratuitous state-sanctioned violence.

Throughout this investigation, it has been shown that the exclusion of these women’s narratives through the circulation of images of their brutalizations closely parallels the principles of aesthetic theory, as well as both Agamben’s *Muselmann* and the *femina sacra* as articulated by Lentin. An examination of American print media and interviews with locals in Tehran, Seattle, and Cairo has revealed that the circulation of particular still images of these three incidents have reinforced the

questionable characterization of these women as passive and helpless victims while masking alternative characterizations of them as activists resistant to their attacks and military or paramilitary forces. This demonstrates Bleiker's and Shepherd's assertions that photographs present an interpretation of an ambiguous event.¹⁰⁶ In addition, the attention paid by American media reports to the culture and politics of Iran and Cairo, as well as interviewees' focus on the prevalence of police brutality in Seattle, illustrates Bleiker's claim that ambiguous photographs can reinforce dominant narratives about political actors.¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, the loss of the testimonies of these women as anything beyond helpless victims of their attackers in both American print media and locals' memories of the events demonstrate Agamben's claim that the *Muselmann's* testimony becomes distorted as others attempt to speak on his behalf.¹⁰⁸ Moreover, the consistent characterization of these women as apolitical victims of violence in newspaper reports and interviewees' lack of awareness of these women's backgrounds lend credibility to the assertions of Lentin and Masters that women's testimonies are in a particularly strong position to be recast as passive and fragile as they are retold.¹⁰⁹ These three women are thus all *feminae sacrae* as defined by Lentin and Masters because their complete testimonies have been silenced and exchanged for more familiar stories of patriarchal violence, police brutality, and feminine passivity and innocence.

Although this paper has helped to illustrate the ways in which the circulation of photographs of Nedā, Rainey, and the "girl in the blue bra" have marginalized these women's experiences, further investigations can help to further elucidate the extent to which this has occurred. First, this paper is necessarily limited in that it only examines American newspaper articles. A further investigation could look at articles originating in Iran and Egypt to identify alternate narratives of these incidents

¹⁰⁶ Bleiker, "The Aesthetic Turn in International Political Theory," 509–510, 513; Shepherd, "Visualising Violence," 215.

¹⁰⁷ Bleiker, "The Aesthetic Turn in International Political Theory," 512.

¹⁰⁸ Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 33–37.

¹⁰⁹ Lentin, "Femina Sacra," 466; Masters, "Femina Sacra," 30–32.

that appear in these countries. In addition, an attempt could be made to more thoroughly investigate the backgrounds of these three women in an attempt to recuperate their lost narratives. A greater focus on Rainey's activism would be fairly simple as she has spoken publicly about her experiences during the Occupy Seattle demonstrations. Although Nedā has been permanently silenced and the "girl in the blue bra" has yet to identify herself, a greater focus only on the testimonies of their accomplices and friends may help to shed light on the histories, experiences, and motivations of these women for being present at anti-regime demonstrations. This paper thus serves as a starting point for further investigations into the ways in which widely circulated images of violent attacks on women can become misconstrued through the inclusion of their narratives within the public sphere through websites and media reports. More work, however, remains to be done to better understand the disparity between these women's testimonies and the narratives that have circulated about them.

At the beginning of this paper, it was asked whether the international focus on these three images suggests that greater attention is being paid to women's narratives. This study has indicated that the treatment of these images has only resulted in a reinforcement of dominant narratives of apolitical women as victims of police, state, and cultural brutality. Concordantly, the effect of this marginalization of women's complete testimonies remains to be investigated. Lentin and Masters both emphasize in their articles on the *femina sacra* that the inaccurate emphasis on women's fragility and passive victimhood ultimately causes viewers to lose sight of the full horrors of violence and perpetuates dominant questionable narratives that certain societies are particularly prone to violent treatment of citizens.¹¹⁰ It is certainly true that in the cases discussed in this study, the focus on these women as passive victims has excluded the testimonies of other, less iconic victims of violence – some of whom, like the "girl in the blue bra's" male accomplice, arguably experienced more violence than these three women. Furthermore, as was shown in the cases of Nedā and the "girl," these pho-

¹¹⁰ Lentin, "*Femina Sacra*," 471; Masters, "*Femina Sacra*," 43.

tographs have been used to perpetuate notions that these two societies are inherently patriarchal – and in the case of Nedā’s death, this event even sparked newspapers to suggest that a tougher American foreign policy against the country was necessary. That single events can reinforce negative cultural constructions and even inspire discussions on international discipline against an entire country shows that the circulation of incomplete testimonies of violence may have dangerous consequences. Ultimately, in order for a more complete understanding of the unique and complex experiences of women who have been subjected to violence, as well as of the societies in which the violence occurs, more attention must be paid to the victims themselves and not only to the narratives that others have told on their behalf.

Appendix: Sources Used for Empirical Analysis

Still images from Videos and Photographs

The following are images of Nedā, Rainey, and the “girl in the blue bra” that I used in the empirical section of my paper.



Figure 1: The Death of Nedā Agha-Soltan¹¹¹



Figure 2: Dorli Rainey, hit with pepper spray at the Occupy Seattle protests¹¹²

¹¹¹ Still shot taken from FEELTHELIGHT, *Her Name Was Neda*.



Figure 3: The Girl in the Blue Bra¹¹³

List of Articles Used in Discourse Analysis in Chapter 3

The following articles were used in my discourse analysis of events surrounding the death of Neda.

- Cohen, Randy. "Neda, Obama and the Power of Pictures." *The New York Times*. June 29, 2009, sec. Opinion. <http://ethicist.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/06/29/the-power-of-pictures/>.
- Coker, Margaret, and Roshanak Taghavi. "Iran Dismisses Vote-Fraud Claims." *The Wall Street Journal*. June 30, 2009, sec. World. <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB124626597362067533.html>.
- Erdbrink, Thomas. "Violence Breaks Out in Streets of Tehran." *The Washington Post*. July 31, 2009, sec. World. http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2009-07-31/world/36913037_1_mousavi-and-mehdi-karroubi-riot-police-mir-hosseini-mousavi.
- . "Woman's Slaying In Protests Creates An Opposition Icon." *The Washington Post*. June 23, 2009, sec. World. http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2009-06-23/world/36789648_1_neda-aga-soltan-mir-hosseini-mousavi-theocratic-government.
- Erdbrink, Thomas, and William Branigin. "Iranian Cleric Calls for 'Ruthless' Punishment of Protest Leaders." *The Washington Post*. June 27, 2009, sec. World. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/06/26/AR2009062600463.html?sid=ST2009062504596>.

¹¹² Trujillo, "Occupy Seattle."

¹¹³ Reuters, "Hillary Clinton's Condemnation of Blue-Bra Beating 'Interference' in Egypt, Foreign Minister Says."

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