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Embodying and Disabling Antiwar Activism: Disrupting YouTube's "Mother's Day for Peace"

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Abstract

YouTube allows activists to broadcast their missions and engage global audiences. "Mother's Day for Peace," a 2007 video, features American actresses who recite Julia Ward Howe's radical 1870 Mother's Day Proclamation and describe their personal thoughts on mothering. Analyzing this video with transnational rhetoric and disability rhetoric frameworks not only illuminates the persuasive possibilities and drawbacks for the video's normative feminine gender performance and the spectacle of a war-injured Iraqi girl but also models an approach that prompts rhetoricians to examine larger rhetorical concerns revealed by the intersections of disability, race, gender, and globalization.

Disciplines

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To care about the body is to care about how we make meaning, to care about how we persuade and *move* ourselves and others.

Jay Dolmage, Disability Rhetoric

Maybe it is too confronting to deal with the continuing disabling of people in the global South because in trying to claim the positives of a disability identity it becomes difficult to acknowledge the overwhelming suffering that results from colonisation, war, famine, and poverty.

Helen Meekosha, "Decolonising Disability"

Although scholars in both transnational feminist rhetorics and disability rhetoric adeptly analyze feature-length documentaries on women's lives such as The Sky (Wendy Hesford, "Documenting Violations") and Beyond Belief (Rebecca Dingo, "Turning the Tables"), as well as documentaries featuring representations of disability, such as Murderball (Markotić and McRuer), short, online activist videos connecting women's lives and bodies globally have yet to be fully considered with these intersecting analytical frames. Nevertheless, perspectives

established by Dingo, Hesford, McRuer, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, and those beyond rhetoric like Meekosha,¹ help identify implications of gendered, embodied short videos. This microanalysis of a single video aims to prompt rhetoricians to examine larger rhetorical concerns revealed by the intersections of disability, race, gender, and globalization.

In 2007, Brave New Foundation (BNF) produced the YouTube video “Mother’s Day for Peace.” Like an increasing number of nonprofits and advocacy organizations, BNF harnesses YouTube’s capabilities to reach audiences. Championing “social justice issues by using media to inspire, empower, motivate and teach civic participation,”² BNF is not known for addressing gender, but this video attempts to articulate war’s meanings for women.

Specifically, the video aims to raise funds for an Iraqi girl whose legs were severed by an American bomb and, through its narrative, to empower American viewers by inspiring them to give money. This intertextual video combines a dramatic recitation of Julia Ward Howe’s landmark pro-peace mission statement, her 1870 “Mother’s Day Proclamation,” delivered by American actresses and other women; contemporary pictures of military servicemen; historical photographs of women protesting war; and brief footage of the Iraqi girl, Salee. While other peace organizations and women activists take up Mother’s Day as an annual moment to focus on their cause and its connections to the holiday by using online media, such as CodePink’s Tumblr that attempts to connect mothers in Iraq and the U.S., this essay focuses on one popular video to reveal its discursive and visual strategies for embodying gender and disability.

The video participates in an expansive and significant context of gendered discourses on war. Post-9/11 arguments for invading Iraq and Afghanistan were built on gendered tropes of women as victims of local circumstances who needed “liberation.” Books like Oliver’s Women As Weapons of War and Al-Ali and Pratt’s What Kind of Liberation? adeptly analyze such

arguments and the outcomes of such damaging claims. Furthermore, women civilians increasingly become war's most likely victims yet are active agents in peacebuilding. As the UN indicated in 2004, "While too often reporting of women in conflict situations shows them as powerless victims, the reality, often glossed over, is that in post conflict situations women are in the forefront when it comes to negotiating and building peace." Such glossing of women's contributions takes place at all stages of conflicts, as women work to prevent war and take on uniquely gendered roles during war. Conflict victimizes rather than liberates women in new and additional ways, epically endangering their lives. In fact, according to Major General Patrick Cammaert, "it has probably become more dangerous to be a woman than a soldier in armed conflict" (United Nations Security Council). Women's war roles have always been complex.

The war in Iraq rearticulated and continues to address gendered tropes that significantly intersect with ethnicity and religion. Rhetoricians have not fully considered how U.S. invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan remake arguments about women's roles and globally reshape women's lives. Furthermore, the video exists among tropes of women's relationship to war and peace activism, long debated by peace activists who must clearly articulate the relationship between gender and peace. Notions of strategic essentialism, feminism's role in patriarchal military actions and global feminism complicate this terrain. This video is an agent in these discursive, meaning-making fields, attempting to secure wartime and postwar roles for women.

I argue here that through this video, BNF composes a story that works to financially support Salee and the organization No More Victims, and yet promotes an unsustainable model of charity-focused activism that hides the U.S.'s role in severing Salee's legs. I reveal how the video leverages its arguments on narratives promoting traditional femininity, furthers arguments for ableist normativity that ignore war's extremely high rate of women and children casualties,

and ultimately, avoids making an antiwar argument. While the video may be persuasive and its success shows through its accrued views, I question the implications of its arguments for the future of gendered peace activism and the sustainability of YouTube as an activist space. Beyond its relevance for gender and peace activism, I highlight the complexity of focusing on disability for peace activists who position themselves against war and its atrocities, hoping to prevent further disabling and death, while working against disability stigmas and emphasizing positive aspects of disability.

My analysis combines frameworks of feminist rhetoric and disability studies, a model I urge other rhetoricians to take up, reiterating Dolmage and Lewiecki-Wilson's call to more deliberately link feminist rhetoric and disability studies. I build on their notion that disability studies "provides an essential critical perspective on the ways knowledge is created, categories are enforced, and bodies are valued across time periods and geographies" (38). By applying a feminist, disability studies lens, my analysis disrupts BNF's simple rescue narrative that resolves itself in repairing Salee's body and achieving "normalcy." Furthermore, inspired by Hesford's work in transnational feminist rhetoric in news media representations of child prostitution and child labor, I apply her notion of "children's rhetorical agency" to identify how the figure of Salee functions to secure this video's success. I complicate Hesford's inquiry to ask what difference disability makes. Hesford writes, "The spectacle of children suffering relies on certain international and national scripts...that displace children's negotiations of enveloping discourses and material circumstances and thereby reinforce their disenfranchisement as moral agents and historical actors in the public sphere" (*Spectacular Rhetorics* 153-154). In this video, Salee's disabled body ultimately emphasizes the U.S. identity as a heroic savior and reinforces the script that U.S. citizens know what is best for Salee.

BNF's choice to display Salee's wounded body as an inert object limits her autonomy as well as the meaning-making potential of her story, which BNF tells for her. More importantly, in light of Meekosha's work on increasing disability perspectives of the global South, this video shows YouTube's power, as a user-generated discursive space, to act as a colonizing force that furthers U.S. policy.

My goal here, then, is not only to articulate the video's rhetorical choices and what the video shows about BNF's understanding of the persuasive possibilities for gender and activism, but also to analyze both the benefits and drawbacks of the rhetorical decisions they make and model a new methodology. To that end, first I briefly address the context of embodied, activist rhetorics and perform a thematically organized descriptive analysis of the video that, informed by Garland-Thomson's and McRuer's visual frameworks of disability reveals its underlying arguments supporting its overall mission. Then I outline the video's implications for feminist rhetoric and disability studies, issuing a call for rhetoricians to more fully attend to intersecting narratives of gender, race, disability, and globalization by expanding my methodology.

Persuasive Bodies

DeLuca identifies qualities of contemporary activist groups, how members "slight formal modes of public argument while performing unorthodox political tactics that highlight bodies as resources for argumentation and advocacy" (9). While not about women peace activists, DeLuca's study applies to their work. Relevant examples include how CodePink activists disguised as bureaucrats surreptitiously entered meetings, later revealing vibrant pink outfits and interrupting with antiwar chants; 30,000 members of the British Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp encircled the nuclear site in the 1980s to protest nuclear weapons; and California

mom Cindy Sheehan occupied property next to President George W. Bush's Texas ranch in 2005 demanding to meet with him after the death of her soldier son.

Historic and contemporary examples abound wherein women use the space their bodies occupy subversively to position themselves as peace activists. DeLuca's claims thus resonate with the historical and contemporary strategies of women peace activists: "These political bodies constitute a nascent body rhetoric that deploys bodies as a pivotal resource for the crucial practice of public argumentation" (10). Rhetoricians thus need to activate this nascent body rhetoric to analyze more fully how arguments hinge on bodies. As Dolmage writes, "Rhetoric is what facilitates the communication and movement between bodies—our own bodies and those around us, our own bodies and the bodies we will become" (197). Like Dolmage's approach, this analysis takes as its main interest an assumption of "the body as the origin and epistemological home of all meaning-making" (125). For gender and peace activism, a body is never just a body but is layered with meanings of war, femininity/masculinity, and victimhood/aggressor.

The video spends most of its time featuring the bodies and perspectives of well-known American actresses who are granted the privilege of defining the video's argument before wresting its cause in the young girl's body. They set up its embodied and nation-based borders, its strict binaries of normative/other, mother/child, and U.S./Iraq. While reading Howe's radical antiwar proclamation, the actresses do not position their bodies in activist stances or depict political action but instead stand and deliver individually in a studio before a pink background. They are nonthreatening. BNF strategized that women who embody conventional standards of beauty and have normative bodies would be most persuasive at delivering Howe's message. Their tone and style make Howe's radical message palatable. Because BNF wants viewers to keep watching (and donate money), they enacted a vision of public mothering and pro-peace

rhetoric embodied in mainstream notions of nonthreatening femininity, emphasizing nurturing and care.

While these collective strategies make sense for the affluent audience BNF hopes to reach, they also limit the progressive possibilities for advocating actions that may actually prevent further injuries like those suffered by Salee. Thus, in the remaining sections I describe the analytical frameworks applied here and critically examine the video to showcase the wider implications of its strategies and analyze its benefits and drawbacks.

This study is informed by Garland-Thomson's taxonomy for historical and contemporary ways of looking at disability: as wondrous, sentimental, exotic, or realistic. As Garland-Thomson writes, "staring at disability choreographs a visual relation between a spectator and a spectacle" (56), a relationship reinscribed with further importance when such visuals go online because spectators can repeatedly pause and rewind them.

Garland-Thomson's taxonomy provides an entry point for understanding how visual arguments make meaning, create emotional resonance, and become reinscribed.

Because staring at disability is considered illicit looking, the disabled body is at once the to-be-looked-at and not-to-be-looked-at, further dramatizing the staring encounter by making viewers furtive and the viewed defensive. Staring thus creates disability as a state of absolute difference rather than simply one more variation in human form. (57)

Viewers' furtiveness is secure because Salee cannot look back at them and because these Hollywood actresses invite looking, having built their careers on being subjected to the public's gaze. Garland-Thomson argues that such sentimental visual rhetoric "produces the sympathetic victim or helpless sufferer needing protection...and invoking pity, inspiration, and frequent contributions" (63). Like the March of Dimes poster children Garland-Thomson analyzes, the

power relations in the BNF video create a firm boundary between Salee and her family and between the actresses and their invoked but unseen families. Furthermore, this binary does not invoke injured American soldiers, whose bodies might fulfill the same visual spectacle as Salee's and blur the boundary.

Building on and eventually reversing the major claim of Garland-Thomson's optimistic conclusion that "realistic" portrayals of disability lead to progress for the future, McRuer writes that her "emphasis on the promise, the realistic mode for representing disability...potentially effects promises in our own era that might be worth questioning" (194). In the case of peace activism and gender, enacting war to create democracy is the promise activists vehemently question. But can we really mark realistic portrayals of war-injured bodies as progress, and do we become complicit to U.S. militarism if we do so? McRuer also complicates Garland-Thomson's analysis by suggesting that, "it might be more difficult to dislodge the dominance of the sentimental mode by redeploying it in a counterhegemonic way, but it is certainly not impossible or unthinkable" (193). Considering my analysis, readers must question whether the disabled girl war victim is a hegemonic or counterhegemonic depiction, promoting the U.S. as a hero or critiquing U.S. invasions that cause such injuries.

That ongoing concern is central to my claim that the video is not against war but rather reinscribes U.S. dominance. Addressing activist organizations specifically, McRuer adeptly taps into the problem with displaying war victims in contexts like YouTube. Such bodies become accepted as mundane representations of our permanent at-war condition. Regarding such routinizing of cultural constructions, he proposes, "are we not potentially in the realm of ideology?" (181). The answer surfacing from this video is yes because using the Iraqi girl or others like her in YouTube videos could become routine, establishing an ideology of accepting

Iraqi children, girls especially, as permanent victims needing U.S intervention. Again, the U.S. perpetration of violence is masked and hidden. Further, inspired by Dolmage's definition of rhetoric as "the strategic study of the circulation of power through communication," I take up his call to "focus on the central role of the body in rhetoric—as the engine for all communication" (3). These substantial concerns for how one activist narrative can make meaning for disability, gender, and globalization inform my analysis, organized chronologically by theme.

Theme One: Radicalizing and Norming Mother's Day in Fewer than Five Minutes

BNF uploaded its video on May 4, 2007, and that week a poll indicated Bush's approval rating hit an all time low at 28%, a rating not scored by a president since Carter in 1979 ("Newsweek poll"). By the end of the month, U.S. opposition to the war had reached an all-time high: "Six in 10 Americans surveyed say the United States should have stayed out of Iraq, and more than three in four say that things are going badly there — including nearly half who say things are going very badly" (Sussman). Thus, BNF's intended audience of civilian Americans may have been primed for antiwar sentiments, and those turning to online sources for news of current events may have even used resources like YouTube to galvanize their opinions about U.S. military missions. Thus, by sidestepping an antiwar argument, BNF likely missed an opportunity to address an audience positioned against military action.

My critique of this video arises from the visual rhetorical strategies used to define the mother-focused holiday and perform a "public mothering." In four and a half minutes, BNF harnesses the historical mission of Mother's Day by deploying Howe's proclamation and describes the video as a partnership with the organization No More Victims (NMV). NMV identifies itself as "a grassroots organization that connects American communities with war-injured children and their families. Community participants band together to learn how the child

was injured, assess the child's current situation, and work to meet the most pressing needs of the child and family."³ Their website includes profiles of 10 children, including Salee. Although NMV includes more information about the injured children than BNF does in this video and lists its location as Wyoming, other details remain masked, such as who funds it, how it establishes a relationship with the injured children, and who makes up its community of participants.

Furthermore, even though subsequent videos reveal that Salee's father travels with her on trips to the U.S. for medical care, NMV's practices reinscribe colonial interventions. Discussing the centrality of colonial narratives and practices to disability studies in the global North, Meekosha writes, "Removal of children from family and community has for centuries been justified on the basis of disability, as has removal of children on the basis of race and gender. The colonial authorities, with assistance from the missionaries, established institutions to contain and control those among the colonised that were viewed as dissident and abnormal" (673). NMV's efforts (endorsed by BNF) to remove Salee from Iraq to repair her body, displays YouTube's power to facilitate this removal without attending to her return.

The video was posted on Mother's Day for a reason. Since Howe's 1870 proclamation, activist women and mothers have used Mother's Day to stage peace protests, invoking Howe's radical intentions and giving the day their own political emphasis. While Howe's intentions for the national holiday have yet to be realized in the mainstream, activists keep her mission alive through their politicization of the day, rejecting its modern commercialization and reclaiming Howe's historical vision.⁴ More recently, organizations like CodePink⁵ use Mother's Day for demonstrations, events that include not only speakers and political gatherings but also the subversion of traditionally feminized activities like knitting and pie baking. Historically and

contemporarily, mother-activists must always recontextualize arguments and reeducate audiences on Howe's original conception of the day and its radical vision.⁶

But BNF does draw on any of these other Mother's Day activist events in its video and its lack of previously addressing gendered peace arguments further highlights why this video is significant for gendered, embodied rhetoric and BNF's understanding of its ad hoc persuasive possibilities. While viewers who watched BNF's video at the time of its release may have been open to or perhaps even embraced peace rhetoric, potentially using YouTube to buttress their growing antiwar sentiment, their knowledge of this holiday's activist history may not have been as secure. BNF claims to have the "#1 most viewed non profit YouTube [channel]," a designation that further emphasizes the importance of analyzing the subtle arguments at play in its video.

Theme Two: Displaying Femininity

The video opens with a close-up shot of Felicity Huffman, whom audiences will likely recognize from her role on television's Desperate Housewives. Facing the camera directly, set against a pink background, she says, "I think it's wonderful to take one day a year and give thanks and appreciation to one of the most difficult jobs there is, being a mother." Then the video cuts to Vanessa Williams, also known for her role in Desperate Housewives and her former Miss America title, who states that "Mother's Day is a joyous time to be thankful for the guidance you've been given by a mother and the gift of having children." Following Williams, Christine Lahti, an actress who has also participated in social justice activism, continues, "Mother's Day to me means a global notion of motherhood. So I can't, um, of course I think about my children and

my mothering of them, but I can't help think about the mothers of all the Iraqi civilian and soldiers who are dying every single day.”

This gendered performance of mothering shapes the rhetorical style of the video. Referring to Elizabeth Cady Stanton and other activists at the time, “The cultural assumption that underscores the popularity of Stanton’s domestic image is the widely held nineteenth-century view that the most important rhetorical role for American women was their healthy moral influence over domestic life” (Johnson 118). Centuries later, BNF still holds this ideology and positions its women rhetors similarly, as domestic authorities and mothers, situated apart from war, politics, or other public matters.

At the end of Lahti’s statements the video features two photos, one after the other. The first features a striking close-up of an unnamed woman who appears to be Iraqi, holding a small child with big, vibrantly blue eyes and caressing the cheek of another child. This image brings to mind the iconic National Geographic cover of the Afghan girl. Applying Hesford’s analysis, BNF displays this image to norm the depiction of the Iraqi mother and child, exoticizing their beauty and sentimentalizing the relationship: “The Afghan girl has become a symbol of American charity and compassion—a representation that rests on the narrative configuration of the girl refugee as a deserving victim in need of rescue...intended to champion human rights within the framework of Western liberation” (Spectacular Rhetorics 1-2). While BNF’s depiction of the Iraqi mother and children does not display disability as Salee’s body does, it attempts to universalize global mothering to set up BNF’s eventual rescue argument. While eliciting emotional responses that promote a mother-like nurture and care of Iraqi children, the image also masks the stark difference in privilege between the concerns of enfranchised American mothers and the constant worries of Iraqi mothers living in a war zone.

The next scene illustrates another unbalanced parallel of motherhood. Lahti states, “I can’t help thinking about the mothers of our own soldiers who are being killed every day,” while the video features a photo of apparently American, male soldiers dressed in camouflage, sitting on and standing around a military vehicle, all facing the camera directly, several smiling. This photo, a casual snapshot, depicts a cohesive community of men. Its intention is to elicit pride and nationalist feelings, framing these individuals not as adults, but as someone’s children who should be treated preciously, with care. As the photo continues its display, Lahti finishes by stating, “I think Mother’s Day is a day to bring violence against our children to an end.” This sentiment, though difficult to disagree with, is not an articulated antiwar stance. So far in the video, then, we have depictions of mothers and children defined by enfranchised Americans who separate themselves from war’s contexts.

This photo of soldiers represents another unbalanced parallel because Lahti specifically delineates her children and mothering as separate from war. None of the actresses identifies herself as a veteran or a soldier’s mother, partner, sister, or child. No female veterans, veterans who identify as parents, or veterans with disabilities speak. Speakers thus far provide a definition of mothering as a life-preserving job and a vision of children as gifts. Their word choice demonstrates their attitudes: Iraqi civilian children and soldiers are “dying” while American soldiers are “being killed,” thereby naturalizing one version of death and criminalizing the other. The most memorable photo—the Iraqi mother and children—while anonymous and framed closely without local context displays femininity, solemnity, and tenderness, whereas the photo of American soldiers displays young, patriarchal, military masculinity, fitness and health, an eagerness to fulfill their heroic destiny.

Theme Three: Activism as Archaic and Apolitical

Fifty seconds in, the video cuts to feminist icon and social activist Gloria Steinem, best known for leading the women's liberation movement and cofounding *Ms.* magazine, speaking in front of the same pink background. Viewers thus fully understand that BNF has not only significant connections to Hollywood actresses and is thus a somewhat powerful media entity but also to public figures like Steinem. She states, "Mother's Day really was in its origin an antiwar day, an antiwar statement. Julia Ward Howe was sickened by what had happened during the Civil War, the loss of life, the carnage, and she created Mothers' Day as a call for women all over the world to come together and create ways of protesting war, of making a kind of alternate government that could finally do away with war as an acceptable way of solving conflict." During Steinem's first mention of Howe's name, a black and white photographic portrait appears of an aged Howe holding a book.

The display of historical photos continues, as we see the iconic 1915 photo of Jane Addams and other Women's Peace Party delegates on the *Noordam* ship, holding the large PEACE banner and bound for the first International Congress of Women.⁷ This image is followed by another black-and-white photo of women activists setting up signs that read "no armies," "humanity," "democracy," and other slogans. The last two photos, not labeled or cited, appear decontextualized from their specific space and time and thus seem to be symbols of historic activism by white women.

This vision of women's activism, then, risks being interpreted as only historical, not contemporary and ongoing. Viewers unfamiliar with women's peace activism might glean from this video that until BNF posted their actress-rich video, no Mother's Day peace activism had occurred since World War I. While this observation may seem exaggerated, feminist historians

and women's rhetoric scholars should be concerned to see a representation of women's activism collapsed and erased, depicted in a way that does not attempt to account for the long and lively history of women's peace activist work. Although a short fundraising video could not cover all of this history, BNF could have used a montage or collage to diversify the representation of women peace activists or at least show a few more ways Mother's Day has been politicized, since both montage and date stamps are effective strategies to make YouTube videos detailed yet quick.

At this point, one minute and 30 seconds into the video, the recitation of Howe's proclamation begins.⁸ Williams first recites, then Huffman, Fatma Saleh, Huffman again, Alfre Woodard (another actress and activist), Williams again, and Saleh again. Ashraf Salimian recites a portion of the proclamation in Arabic and then translates it into English. The approach is deliberately choral and multivoiced, yet the women each remain separate, framed individually. BNF constructs the recitation to feature women who look and speak somewhat differently (Saleh, e.g., wears a hijab), and yet connote a tone of generalized mothering and femininity. The women all stand in front of the same pink backdrop and seem to be about the same age.

While all the American actresses featured are recognizable to an American, pop culture-consuming audience, the video offers no contextual information about Saleh nor Salimian, just as the historical photos go uncited. Without contextual details, either in the video or in the video's description, their presence is easily read as tokenizing, perhaps an attempt to symbolize that Howe's proclamation includes (assumably) Muslim or Arab women. But neither Salimian nor Saleh speak beyond reciting the proclamation and are not offered the platform occupied by actresses who describe their emotional relationships to mothering. The video implicitly argues, then, that the actresses' opinions and experiences are most important.

Theme Four: Reclamation through Donation

Mobilizing beyond descriptions of caring mothers, still photographs, and recitation, the video ends with its defining argument and request for donation. An intertitle reads, “It’s time to take Mother’s Day back,” and a narrator states, “In the spirit of Mother’s Day and its origin, you can help a child this year by donating to No More Victims as a gift to your mother this Mother’s Day. No More Victims brings war-injured Iraqi children to the United States to receive the medical treatment they need. You’ll help bring Salee, who lost both of her legs in the war in Iraq.” During this narration viewers experience the dramatic climax, the silent video of an Iraqi household assumed to be Salee’s home. The video features an older Iraqi woman, perhaps Salee’s mother or grandmother, talking, seated, and holding two small children. The video recording of Salee’s context is silent as the narrator, soliciting funds, speaks over it. Next to the woman is Salee, who, looking directly at the camera (perhaps at the person recording the video), pulls a blanket from her legs, revealing her bandaged legs that end just below the knees.

The camera rests on Salee a few more moments and then fades back to actress Woodard who states, “My mother used to say all the time, I look after people’s kids because one day I know somebody will look after my kids. I feed people’s kids because I know somebody one day will feed my kids. That informs a lot of who I am as a mother. That I’m not only parenting Mavis and Duncan, but I’m responsible for every child that comes through.” But the video does not claim that global motherhood means ceasing bombing, deactivating drones, or any antiwar sentiment. Instead, it asks viewers to mother Salee by funding her medical needs as it defines them.

The video then closes with a URL for CodePink's Mother's Day website. This link seems oddly chosen since CodePink had not been mentioned so in the video.⁹ Why BNF chose not to list the link to their own website or NMV's website (which includes much more contextual information on Salee) shows its interest in connecting its work to women's peace activism, however weak that connection may be. Compared to the work of CodePink, its stance against the larger context of the war and the U.S. military actions that caused the severing of Salee's legs seems abbreviated at best.

In fact, BNF's efforts to depoliticize a political video resonate further by using the verb *lost* to describe Salee's legs instead of a more active, blame-placing verb (as CodePink activists would do). BNF's strategy here seems to be distancing itself from CodePink's resounding and clear antiwar stance, reiterating BNF's hope that a more conservative framing of Salee's injuries would persuade people to donate. But CodePink's URL betrays BNF's ambivalence and desire for its video to have dual meanings. Although it wants to be part of the antiwar activist community, it does not want to publish a resolute activist video.

While the video situates itself as reclaiming Howe's vision and reactivating Mother's Day's radicalism, it instead suggests that viewers focus on Salee's body and spend money. Positioning the U.S. as hero, the video allows viewers to imagine the U.S. as capable of "curing" or "fixing" disability rather than needing to develop accommodations for war-injured individuals and communities or provide infrastructures to supply in-country support for the many wounded Iraqi civilians. And since it does not critique U.S. military action, the video masks the irony of the U.S. being both perpetrator of violence and rescuer of its own victims.

The video strives to norm Salee's body instead of arguing against war and the U.S. invasion. Salee's body, then, can stand in for Iraq, and BNF's video can become interpreted as

pro-U.S. propaganda. Drawing on World Bank policies of gender mainstreaming, Dingo also connects bodies and nations, showing how the Bank's "rhetoric of fitness...implies an erasure of difference as it discounts non-Western or other forms of economic viability and...bodily viability." The rhetoric of fitness thus "rests upon the audience's desire to comprehend or make 'normal' a country's economic, social, and governmental practices—another form of global governmentality where bodies and economies are uniformly managed" (68). Salee's hoped-for repaired body thus stands in for viewers' idealized democratic Iraq, theoretically achieved by U.S. intervention.

We must ask ourselves how activists can maintain a pro-peace message during this overwhelming permanence of war, a message that must deal with the implications of insisting on the repair of Salee's body, made possible by funding from enfranchised viewers removed from war's contexts. We cannot ignore who and what causes such injuries and deaths and who profits from such violence. As Meekosha writes, "Impaired people are 'produced' in the violence and war that is constantly provoked by the North, either directly or indirectly, in the struggle over the control of minerals, oil and other economic resources—ultimately control of the land and sea themselves" (668). No end in sight exists for this production Meekosha described in 2011. At the time of this writing (summer of 2014), the U.S. is again preparing to increase military operations in Iraq as President Obama authorizes airstrikes.

Implications for Rhetoric, Disability, Feminism, and Transnationality

Dingo provides an analytical framework for understanding how claims to "empowerment" can have complicated results, including disempowering ones. Relevant to BNF's claims to "empower" with their YouTube videos, Dingo analyzes the ideological claims

behind global philanthropic initiatives like microlending. Women's empowerment rhetoric thus moves "from a model wherein women (and men) make decisions about their needs to a normalizing model that discounts individual and community desires (Networking Arguments 133). We see a similar model in BNF's video, as the narrative does not position Salee or her family as decision makers or feature Salee as a member of a larger community, one widely experiencing war's aftermath. Again, BNF bets that its viewers want to interpret its cause as a single war victim and that they would be turned off by depictions of war's overwhelming civilian atrocities. It simplifies its cause to appeal to viewers' desires to enact "empowerment" through the donation transaction.

Addressing representations of children specifically, Hesford's framework helps us see how BNF does not facilitate Salee's access to agency in this video, but instead defines the meaning of her presence, her body. Articulating the possibilities of opening pathways of agency for children, Hesford writes, "Agency is not an individual enterprise; rather, an individual's agency is enabled and constrained by cultural discourses and material forces" (Spectacular Rhetorics 156). In this context, then, BNF "fits" Salee into its video by framing her in a discourse of care and rescue. Thus, it assumes its viewers are most persuaded by a passive representation of a young, female war victim.

BNF features Salee in other ways in two follow-up videos to "Mother's Day for Peace." These videos featuring Salee, her father, and a NMV representative depict handheld camcorder footage of Salee and her father telling their story, including details that the same bombing that severed her legs also killed Salee's brother and best friend. The NMV representative translates as they speak. In one video, Salee uses a nonfunctioning wheelchair while her father and the NMV representative articulate their hope for medical assistance and resources for Salee. Neither of

these videos has the production costs and professional look of “Mother’s Day for Peace” nor have they garnered as many views on YouTube. At this time, the actresses’ video has over 189,000 views whereas the NMV and wheelchair videos have 1,900 and 9,900 views, respectively. Thus, while the less professional, non-star-studded videos present a more complex context than does the fundraising video, and their tone is somber, not reassuring, they receive much less circulation and attention. That said, I do not know how BNF directs attention to its different videos, perhaps it links to or promotes the actresses’ video more frequently.

The video strategically deploys normative, feminine, conventionally beautiful American women juxtaposed with the othered, foreign, disabled Iraqi girl to evoke a clear relationship of traditional mothering coupled with the desired innocent childhood. It therefore bypasses the more overwhelming, detrimental relationship between occupier/occupied, US/Iraq, and bomber/bombed. As Garland-Thomson points out, none of her categories of visual rhetoric operates in the service of actual disabled people, but instead appropriates the disabled body for the purposes of constructing, instructing, or assuring the viewer (59). Critical viewers of this video must uncover the myths operating to make such assurance possible. Drawing on Barthes’s *Mythologies*, McRuer reminds us that myth-making works to craft moral values as self-evident (180), as BNF hopes its viewers will donate for Salee without thinking twice.

While Hesford and Dingo at times reference disability scholarship, we must more substantially connect the overlapping contexts of gender, race, disability, and globalization as transnationality brings into focus such linkages. Dingo’s framework for analyzing how public policy norms and mainstreams women, especially, must be used to show how gendered feminine bodies are normed in neoliberal manners. The importance of gender cannot be overstated. As Dolmage’s work has shown, femininity and disability are historically and contemporarily

intertwined (Disability Rhetoric 70, “Metis, Mêtis, Mestiza, Medusa”). Identifying as feminine others a body and marginalizes an individual; such positioning is ever poignant in the context of war.

Likewise, while transnational feminist scholars urge us to look beyond the nation state, work like Meekosha’s that emphasizes stark differences between the global North and South and how those differences have shaped our disability scholarship must lead us. Furthermore, the context of war has not been fully considered by disability or transnational feminist rhetoric, despite its pervasive presence in our lives. Neglecting such contexts maintains the status quo and again masks injuries and loss. Writing about Iraq in 2011, Meekosha states that disability “figures from the U.S. wars are relatively easy to obtain” (675), citing statistics for numbers of American amputees and other data. But in 2013, International Business Times cited that the U.S. government would no longer report the number of veterans injured in Iraq and Afghanistan, a number that had likely hit one million (Reno). To sidestep war as an articulating force for gender and disability in a global frame is to perform similar ideological withholding.

Ultimately, “Mother’s Day for Peace” features BNF’s ability to create and upload a professional looking, visually appealing fundraising video. While BNF clearly wants to raise money for Salee’s medical procedures, applying the analytical lenses of transnational feminist rhetorical theory and disability theory reveals how this video also promotes an ideology that U.S. war atrocities can be rehabilitated by rehabilitating Salee, an impossible proposition.

The caring mother described by the actresses does not convey the significant damage done to war’s civilians or the fact that Iraq is populated with countless cases like Salee’s. While the video’s outcome and Salee’s perspective on the video’s ability to bring about positive change in her life remain unknown, this video does not ultimately take an antiwar stance, which viewers

can easily assume Salee would hold and hope to promote in media representations of her life and body. Instead, to secure donations, the video participates in a U.S.-dominated discourse that serves to benefit the U.S. most of all.

As Jen Wingard writes, “Branding of bodies and the assembling of those brands work to turn ‘others’ into rhetorical products, much like consumable products in advertising” (ix). Salee’s body becomes an object that YouTube audiences hold the power to change and improve. While Salee’s body is not represented as the same type of threat as immigrant and sex-offender bodies (Wingard), it instead threatens mainstream notions of the normalized body, violating viewers’ concepts of health, well-being, and childhood innocence.

For feminist rhetoricians, disability researchers, and others concerned with the implications of online, embodied, gendered rhetorics, this video prompts a call for more transnationally framed analyses of mediated texts that mobilize at the intersections of gender and disability. This microanalysis can be a starting point to consider similar texts in comparable ways, unpacking the persuasive ideologies exchanged in global discourses. Rhetoricians must more substantially take up analytical frameworks established by transnational feminist scholars and disability studies theorists to address these globalized narratives and ideologies, which almost always overlap with race, ethnicity, class, and other considerations. Doing so addresses power differentials that are always central to the study of rhetoric.

Notes

¹ I am greatly indebted to RR peer reviewers Anne Demo, who helped me sharpen my focus, and Jay Dolmage, who both illuminated the broader implications of my analysis and introduced me

to Meekosha's invaluable work. Cindy Lewiecki-Wilson, Maggie LaWare, and Jason Palmeri also provided feedback that benefited my analysis during earlier stages of this project.

² Led by president Robert Greenwald, BNF produces film projects with activist causes, addressing such issues as improving U.S. worker safety, ending petroleum drilling, revealing the power of billionaire Koch brothers, and uncovering U.S. military spending. Greenwald has directed and produced numerous short films with his company Brave New Films, including exposes of Fox News, Walmart, and more. BNF's activist videos clearly showcase their intention to inspire and create change toward progressive causes.

³ For the description I draw on here, see <http://archive.is/0RFII> For NMV's updated website, see: <http://www.nomorevictims.org/newsite/about/>.

⁴ According to holiday historian Jones, Mother's Day has facilitated a variety of political and social action. For example, in 1933 President Roosevelt issued a proclamation on Mother's Day that called attention to mothers and children living in poverty (216) and in 1968 Coretta Scott King led a Mother's Day march to support poor children and their mothers (217). Regarding peace-related political action, a "Mother's Peace Day" parade was held in 1938, and decades later in the 1980s, Helen Caldicott founded the Women's Party for Survival, organized against nuclear arms and proliferation. The Party led demonstrations on Mother's Day. Most recently, on May 2, 2012, supermodel Christy Turlington's organization, Every Mother Counts, which focuses on maternal mortality, uploaded the video, "No Mothers Day," prompting mothers to be silent and "disappear" on Mother's Day in order to "help raise awareness about the hundreds of thousands of women who die each year from complications during pregnancy or childbirth" (See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x0w669fZBH8>).

⁵ Established in 2002, CodePink (<http://www.codepink4peace.org/>) identifies itself as a grassroots peace and social justice organization. While not exclusively, its approaches and strategies are women initiated, women led, and often based on traditionally feminine tropes such as the color pink.

⁶ Attending to the massive influence of Mother's Day as a major cultural event in the U.S. is beyond the confines of this article, but I encourage readers to look out for activist events that coincide with the holiday.

⁷ This photograph can be viewed online: <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/ggb2005018835/>

⁸ Widely available online, the full document can be read at CodePink's website:

<http://www.codepinkalert.org/article.php?id=217>

⁹ As of this writing, the site includes broken links and brief information on 2010's International Women's Day, another example of a lack of using YouTube's ability to maintain a presence and further the ongoing discourse regarding Mother's Day's potential for antiwar activism.

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