Postcolonial Disability in Mohesen Makhmalbaf’s Kandahar

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Postcolonial Disability in Mohesen Makhmalbaf’s *Kandahar*

*Kandahar* (2001), an Iranian film directed by Mohsen Makhmalbaf, details the journey of the protagonist, Nafas, to Kandahar to save her sister from committing suicide on the day of the solar eclipse. The film has gained recent attention by disability studies scholars for the representation of disability in Afghanistan; scholars have discussed the significance of prosthetics and international aid for the disabled in post-war zones of the Third World, but little has been said about disability as a postcolonial embodiment. I argue that *Kandahar* represents the postcolonial state as a disabled space both literally and metaphorically. It projects the veil as a disabling mask that traps and dehumanizes Afghani women as secondary subjects of the state; it also portrays crippled bodies that have been ravaged by insurrections and nationalisms. The film displaces notions of privacy, humanity, and able-bodied-ness to introduce queer gendering and coupling along the passage to Kandahar. By mapping disability on the physical geography of Afghanistan Makhmalbaf elicits a postcolonial reading of the Third World where poverty, famine, and dearth engender new identities and belongings. Some of the questions that I seek to explore along the paper include: How does postcolonial disability displace the historical narrative of disability? To what effect do prosthetics circulate as replaceable first-world commodities in the Third World? How does disability intersect with race, class, and gender in the film? I draw from the works of Leonard Davis, Rosemary Garland Thomson, David Serlin, Sharon Snyder, David Mitchell, and Nirmala Erevelles among other disability studies scholars to frame the theoretical context for this paper. I hope to highlight the interaction between disability as a global phenomenon and disability as a local/personal experience through this film.