

What Can a Book Do?

Following a Book through a Literary Controversy and a War.

The Case of *The Bookseller of Kabul*.

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Abstract

This thesis discusses Åsne Seierstad's international literary bestseller *The Bookseller of Kabul* (2002) and the controversy it created between the Norwegian author and the Afghan family presented in the book. Rather than asking what a book is, this research asks what a book does. It investigates the mechanisms through which a book like *The Bookseller of Kabul* can produce consequences in the contemporary world. In order to approach these productive abilities of books, the thesis develops an extended notion of the book as a relational and processual set of entities. Consequently, the thesis calls for research, which would take into account the complex relations between what we read and how we are able to read it. Methodologically, the emphasis is on material culture, the social life of the book and the actor-networks the book created as a global commodity. The thesis investigates how different actors and materialities collectively created the book and its consequences. Consequently, it discusses the relations a contemporary literary object needs and builds to other forms of media, to different materialities, to readers and to discourses in order to generate power effects. Because books are highly diffusible objects and enjoy a freedom and a status unthinkable for many other commodities, interventions against a literary bestseller are difficult if not impossible to carry forward. As a consequence, a book like *The Bookseller of Kabul* can play an unacknowledged role at the times when Western countries are involved in a war in Afghanistan.

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Abbreviations used in this thesis:

AP = Aftenposten (Norwegian newspaper)

BT = Bergens Tidende (Norwegian newspaper)

DB = Dagbladet (Norwegian newspaper)

HS = Helsingin Sanomat (Finnish newspaper)

NRK = Norsk Rikskringkasting (Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation)

NYT = New York Times (US newspaper)

VG = Verdens Gang (Norwegian newspaper)

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Socrates:

I cannot help feeling, Phaedrus, that writing is unfortunately like painting; for the creations of the painter have the attitude of life, and yet if you ask them a question they preserve a solemn silence. And the same may be said of speeches. You would imagine that they had intelligence, but if you want to know anything and put a question to one of them, the speaker always gives one unvarying answer. And when they have been once written down they are tumbled about anywhere among those who may or may not understand them, and know not to whom they should reply, to whom not: and, if they are maltreated or abused, they have no parent to protect them; and they cannot protect or defend themselves.

Plato, Phaedrus

1. INTRODUCTION

This thesis started with a simple and naïve question: what can books do? Not what they are, but what they do. They certainly do something, they produce consequences – or otherwise, what would be the point in writing, publishing, and reading them? Should we not be able to say that books have some influence? Or why else would we have all the public libraries, literacy programs, and education based on the practice of reading books? If they could not do anything, why would anyone open a publishing house or a bookshop? Why would UNESCO have designated a World Book Day to celebrate books and reading each year (World Book Day 2009)? And in the last instance, why would all those readers buy and read books? Do they not have better, more important things to do?

For one thing, books may help their readers relax, but promoting reading and literature is also regularly seen as a means to enable personal transformation or emancipation. Critical thinking, self-reflection and social transformation are ideals often attached to reading. This is well demonstrated for example in a project, which encourages US prisoners to read books in order to change their lives.¹ Similarly, the immensely popular TV-show, Oprah's Book Club, promoted the idea that we "love books because you read about somebody else's life but it makes you think about your own" (cit. Striphas 2009, 128).²

In this thesis, I will ask the seemingly straightforward question about the ability of books to produce consequences through a book called *The Bookseller of Kabul* (Seierstad 2004a, originally in Norwegian *Bokhandleren I Kabul*, Seierstad 2002) and a public controversy it created between an Afghan family and a Norwegian journalist.

In 2001 an award-winning Norwegian journalist, Åsne Seierstad, was reporting the war in Afghanistan for several Scandinavian media. During her time in Kabul, she met a well-known bookseller Shah Muhammed Rais. They became friends, and soon she moved into his family's home with the intention to write a book. She stayed with the family for three to four months, between January and April 2002, and in September 2002 a book, *Bokhandleren I Kabul*, was published in Norway. The book, which used pseudonyms, concentrated on the stories of the

¹ Changing Lives Through Literature (CLTL) is a program, which aims to use literature to reduce offending. "Literature has the power to transform men's and women's lives" is the philosophy behind CLTL (CLTL 2009).

² Oprah's Book Club was a book discussion group that was part of the Oprah Winfrey Show, which was produced in the USA. For the discussion on how "book reading has been valued on Oprah's Book Club because of its capacity to provoke critical introspection", see Striphas 2009, 111–140.

family and their relatives, but the family had not seen the manuscript. During the autumn and the following spring the reception was almost purely positive. Soon, the book turned into a great success in Norway and also in Sweden, where it had been published in September 2002. Consequently, the foreign rights were sold to several countries.

Shah Muhammed Rais read the book first in 2003, once it had been translated into English. He was shocked because of the private – and what he saw as slanderous – content of the book, and as a consequence he boarded an aeroplane, travelled to Norway, and made his critical views public. This created a long and difficult controversy between the family and the author. The topic was discussed all over the Norwegian media. In 2006, part of the family applied for asylum in Sweden and consequently started to live in Norway with a temporary permit for residency (VG 15.07.06).³ In 2008, one woman of the family, Suraia Rais, sued the author and the publisher for invasion of privacy, and the first judgement was given in July 2010 at Oslo District Court (Oslo Tingrett 2010). In December 2010, more than eight years after the publication of the book, its rights had been bought to 41 countries, and it had sold more than two million copies internationally (Høier 2010 & 01.02.10). The book had created a close relationship between two most unlikely countries in the margins of the global system, Afghanistan and Norway. Consequently, more or less every Norwegian knew one Afghan by name, and a Norwegian NGO, Afganistan komiteen, built a school in Afghanistan with the profits the book had created (AP 28.12.04). On the surface, the book seemed to support Afghan female emancipation, and the controversy seemed to be a sign of a successful subaltern intervention. But it can also be interpreted as a series of events that contributed once again to global power inequalities and to the legitimization of the war. After all, in January 2011 when I am finishing my thesis, Afghanistan is still a war zone, and Norwegian troops are still in the country.

The global importance of Afghanistan has changed drastically while I have been writing my thesis. When I started to plan my research in 2006, five years after the invasion in 2001, I felt that Afghanistan was again gaining importance in the Western news agenda. The so-called liberation of Kabul in November 2001 (see e.g. Bbc.co.uk 03.11.01) had been only one milestone in the war. By the time Barack Obama was elected as US president in 2009, Afghanistan had returned to the everyday news agenda. Obama's policy was to shift focus from the unpopular war in Iraq to the war in Afghanistan. While campaigning in 2008, he repeatedly said that as president he would reinforce the US troops in Afghanistan and "make

³ I refer to media texts by using abbreviations and the date of publication or broadcasting. The details for these kind of media sources are in the bibliography. The data gathering method for the media texts is explained in chapter 3.1.

the fight against al-Qaida and the Taliban the top priority that it should be" (see e.g. CNS 29.09.09, PBS 15.07.08, Boston.com 15.07.08).

Norway's increased engagement in Afghanistan started in December 2001, when the country established The Royal Norwegian Embassy in Kabul. Almost seven years later, on 12.09.2008 Norway's official website in Afghanistan stated that: "As a reflection of Afghanistan's importance on the global political agenda, our engagement has grown substantially, with strengthened military presence through ISAF and increasing humanitarian assistance and development cooperation." (Norway 2008.) In January 2011, Norway still had troops in Afghanistan as part of the NATO-led ISAF (International Security Assistance Force) operation.

The Bookseller of Kabul was written, published and sold in the middle of these events. It was a book written by a war correspondent in and about a country in a war, or recovering from a war. Consequently, I asked myself whether the book had something to do with this war. Following my initial question, I wondered, how the text had managed to turn into two million copies and into a controversy. How did these events take place – and did these transformations have a relation to the war, or not?

To get closer to these questions of what *The Bookseller of Kabul* could do, in this thesis I will use two main perspectives on the case. Firstly, through an actor-network theory (ANT) inspired analysis I will investigate how the book emerged and turned into a scandal. And secondly, I will follow the trajectories and transfigurations of the book as an object to understand how it travelled and transformed globally? The first perspective puts emphasis on the emergence of relations and networks, the second on the trajectories and the transformations of the objects. One case, two perspectives. Let me explain why.

1.1 BOOKS AS FIXED SACRED TEXTS, OR AS HYBRID CAPITALIST COMMODITIES?

Before starting my PhD program I had been trained in comparative literature, but as far as I knew, the question of literature's consequences had never really shaken the long tradition of literary studies. Not many had asked what are the mechanisms through which a book can have consequences, and influence those who read but also those who do not read? How to take the

crucial step from studying representations or even discourses to studying how these representations turn into effects?⁴ How to approach the generative abilities of books?

This is when I turned to Bruno Latour, “the prince of networks” (see Harman 2009). He is a scholar who is famous for devoting his career to hybridities and complexities, trying to understand how relations between humans and non-humans, between objects and human actors emerge. Thus, Latour was supposed to be someone who encourages us to understand the complexity behind the most everyday practices. I read through his work on machines and laboratories, on science and technology, and when I finally arrived to a point where he mentions literature, what did I find? In his academic bestseller *We have never been modern* (1993a, 2), Latour points to literature in the introduction. He refers to the literary supplement as the restful place in the newspaper where no hybridity or multiplicity takes place – in contrast to other sections or articles where a constant jumble is present. Those other articles are mixing together chemical and political action; they are building and referring to hybrids between machines, human intentions, laws, religions, viruses, industrialists etc. But, fortunately according to Latour, the literary supplement gives the reader a rest.

I was shocked. Even if only cursorily, Latour seemed to refer to an imagery of relaxation with armchairs, good books, and glasses of wine or cups of tea – when I was dealing with a case, which involved immigration, court decisions, international logistics, and a media scandal. Was he joking when he implied that literature has nothing to do with laws, religions, human intentions, and machines?⁵

Consequently, this chapter (which leads us to understand the case of *The Bookseller of Kabul*) deals with the question of the making or the emergence of a book as something, which has a

⁴ I use the concept of discourse primarily in a Foucauldian (e.g. 2003) sense, to refer not only to linguistic formations but also to practices. I find Stuart Hall’s (1996, 201) often used definition appropriate here, according to which discourse is “a group of statements which provide a language for talking about – i.e. a way of representing – a particular kind of knowledge about a topic. When statements about a topic are made within a particular discourse, the discourse makes it possible to construct the topic in a certain way. It also limits the other ways in which the topic can be constructed.” However, as will become evident, in this thesis, the concept of *apparatus* is more central than that of the discourse.

⁵ This could be just an innocent slip, but as Adrian Johns (1998) has noted, Latour has a tendency to simplify the nature of the book and its functions. The same is true when Latour discusses authors. They are genius-like figures working in isolation – unlike the scientists whom Latour sees as actors in networks. One symptomatic example comes from *Pasteurization of France* (1993b) where Latour problematizes the long tradition of granting individual men the glory over world historical shifts, but paradoxically he suggests that it was Tolstoy (alone) who changed this view. The reader gets a feeling as if it is natural for an author to change paradigms with only one text, whereas otherwise shifts are a result of a long struggle, which includes multiple actors. (However, for a little more nuanced discussion, see Latour 1998).

lot to do with hybridity, multiplicity or mixing together of chemical and political actions, machines, human intentions, laws, religions, viruses, industrialists etc. It approaches the book as *relational* and *processual*. This means I put emphasis on the relations a book needs or creates, and on the temporal processes behind these relations. Many have done research on the relations books (as objects) have with the rest of the society in a historical perspective (see e.g. Johns 1998, Chartier 1994, Frasca-Spada & Jardine 2000), but studying contemporary books as relational processes happens rarely.

Approaching books as processual and relational sets of entities should shed new light on the common view that texts are above all lasting, closed, durable and highly diffusible devices, which may even guarantee fixity (see also discussion on immutable mobiles, for example in Latour 1987 & 1993b). For example John Law (1986a, 49) – who has worked closely with Latour – writes that the most important element coming out of the laboratory is texts, because they are “durable and extremely transportable”, “reproducible and thus highly diffusible”, and because a text “may act in many places simultaneously”. He goes even so far as to say, “[p]eople may lie to us. Machines do not talk. But texts, once inscribed and diffused, cannot be changed” (ibid. 50). In a similar fashion, Jay David Bolter (1991, 2, 87) makes a distinction between pragmatic communication (that happens, for example, with the help of computers) and books as lasting texts, which are characterized by a sense of closure. Also Walter Ong (2001, 132) has suggested that print “encourages a sense of closure, a sense that what is found in a text has been finalized, has reached a state of completion.” Similarly, Elizabeth Eisenstein (1979) – in her influential book on the emergence of print culture – has named fixity and stability as the essences of printing and hence of printed products.

This is the commonplace starting point for studies on printed texts, but it easily obscures those aspects of printed material that cannot be taken back to technology, or at least not to *printing* technology. To challenge some of these presumptions, I believe we should ask more often how the making of a book does not end when the book comes from the print. The luxury of fixity and closure can be enjoyed only for a short moment – before the number of relations explodes again. Neither is the process of production without its complexities between changes and fixities. The hybridity and multiplicity of actors that was needed for the production of a book (editors, publishers, writers, papers, machines) turns into the multiplicity that takes place after the printing of the text (commentators, readers, sellers, logistics, trucks, libraries, marketing). The time of printing stands for one particular moment, entity, or relation – and it should not be privileged. This is a lesson, Latour in principle teaches us, when he writes about the collective making of scientific facts. According to him, to determine the efficiency of a mechanism we should not look for its *intrinsic* qualities but at all the transformations it undergoes *later* in the hands of others (Latour 1987, 258).

Hence, my work investigates what happens after the object we call the book has been made – or simultaneously what does the making already stand for. Books are put into use and valorised in multiple ways. The object interacts with other entities. It needs relations also with other technologies than printing machines, such as means of transportation, new media, or electronic media. These different but necessary relations and uses are at the heart of my research. In that sense, this thesis goes beyond the text called *The Bookseller of Kabul*. I am more interested in its circulation and transfigurations than in interpreting it, or in finding its meaning. This means the literary text is at no moment kept separate from the relations it produces, nor from the relations that produce it. As Latour (1991, 106) writes, “we are not to follow a given statement through a *context*. We are to follow the simultaneous production of a ‘text’ and a ‘context’”.

One of these contexts that gets produced simultaneously with *The Bookseller of Kabul* is the institution of literature. I believe, our understanding of the role literature as an institution plays in our liberal societies is reproduced and modified through cases like that of the bookseller. Through our readings of controversial books we either strengthen our understanding of literature as something, which offers a restful space without hybridity and complexity, or alternatively we learn to see the institution of literature in relation to other institutions, materialities and forces. Consequently, I hope to understand how a man like Latour could casually refer to literature as an uncomplex matter. In order to do this we need to sketch the space of literature in today’s world, and those practices that produce or perform it. Even if our times are dominated by visual, virtual or digital culture, the book has not disappeared. It is difficult to imagine what at least Western societies would be without the wealth of resources that are preserved and disseminated between generations and places in the form of the book, as John B. Thompson (2005, 1) has noted. Books can even be seen as sacred products. As Ted Striphas (2009, 6) writes:

“conventional wisdom says there’s --- something that sets books apart from, say, light bulbs, DVDs, automobiles, and other mass merchandise ---- The value of books would seem to lie, first and foremost, in their capacity for moral, aesthetic, and intellectual development, and only secondarily – if at all – in the marketplace. What makes a “good” book good – or, rather, what makes books good – is their purported ability to transcend vulgar economic considerations for the sake of these loftier goals.”

For others, the book is an object, which along with print technology, has significantly contributed to the emergence or the stabilization of several modern institutions, like nation (Anderson 1991, Eisenstein 1979), constitutions (Johns 1998), science (Eisenstein 1979), and public sphere (Habermas 1991). Jason Epstein (2001, xi) goes as far as to say that printing “gave birth to the Reformation, the Enlightenment, the scientific and industrial revolutions, and the societies that resulted: in other words, our present world with all its wonders and woes”.

One further link between literature and modern institutions is the role the book has played in the history of capitalism. The book can be seen as the one object, which works as a paradigmatic example of the developments in the economic model of the West, in other words of capitalism. What if we approached the book as an object, which history (and maybe also future) reflects, mediates and constructs the developments in capitalism? More specifically, if we are moving towards an immaterial phase in economic production (or postfordism), as many would argue (see e.g. Hardt & Negri 2001, Lazzarato 1996), would the book not work as a paradigmatic example of this movement? The history of the book demonstrates the movement from industrialism to the immaterial phase in economy. Developments of capitalism, and also the antagonisms inside the category of commodity, are well presented in the book: if we do not count bricks, books can be described as the first mass produced commodity (McLuhan 1994, Ong 2001), the copyrights first came into being in book trade, and the appropriation of texts by individuals has been formulated in discussions over authorship (see e.g. Woodmansee & Jaszi 1994).⁶ In other words, the ownership of immaterial goods has been closely tied to the question over authorship and books. According to Walter Ong (2001, 118–119), typography and printing turned the word into a commodity. What was previously an oral – and hence common – word, became a private property in the form of the book, and under the copyrights. Even if Ong’s argument follows the lines of technological determinism, his idea that the commodification of the word started with print reminds us of an insight we easily forget when discussing literature. The institution of literature is very much *object-mediated*. And even if technological developments are supposed to bring changes to the field, the dominant mode of literature is still tied to one particular object, the book, which was the first mass produced commodity – and remains a commodity and a private property under the copyright regime. Moreover, as Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin (1976, 109) have noted “from its earliest days printing existed as an industry, governed by the same rules as any other industry”. Also the more recent developments in publishing have shown how the book is very much a commodified object. The ISBN system has been called one of the first universal codification system of commodities, and for example the global online trade of Amazon started with books. (Striphas 2009, 162.) What happens to this mode of discourse and to this first mass produced

⁶ By commodity I refer to privately owned goods which are sold on the market and often also produced *for* the market. In my use, the word does not imply strongly an identical, fixed or homogenous form (compare with Lash & Lury 2007, 4–6). As will become evident, in this thesis, the movement between fixity/identity and transformations/difference is a recurrent theme. My choice of the word commodity, in other words, does not suggest that I would not acknowledge the transformations the object goes through, on the contrary.

industrial commodity, might tell us something about what is happening to capitalism, and to the discourses that are closely tied to its intellectual basis.

However, even if the book seems to be this neatly definable commodity, because of contingent reasons it should not be reduced to it, nor to any other single function or definition. As Jacques Derrida (2005, 4–5) writes, the book is not reducible or equal to writing. Neither is it the same as the mode of writing, nor the technology of inscription. It is also not identical with the work (oeuvre). But in order to see this, we need to forget about the restfulness of literature.

The Bookseller of Kabul takes place amid these questions. As will be demonstrated in the following chapters, a Norwegian journalist first got interested in Shah Muhammed Rais because he was a bookseller. Already at that moment, books were mediating something essential, namely social status, class position, or communication across cultures. Because Rais shared Seierstad's interest in (mostly) Western books and literature, he appeared as interesting to an educated Norwegian woman.⁷ He shared the Western understanding of books to such an extent, that he himself became material for a book, a widely circulating commodity, which now mediates Afghanistan, the war, and the lives of the family members.

The fact that *The Bookseller of Kabul* has been able to do all that it has, suggests that books do occupy a central – and maybe also privileged – position in modern Western imaginaries and societies (with their legislations and institutions). *The Bookseller of Kabul* is more influential, it is allowed more, and taken more seriously than many other commodities or even modes of description – like newspaper articles. I suggest that this privileged space granted to books is closely tied to liberal freedoms – the way for example Slavoj Žižek (2002) sees those freedoms as supplements for capitalism, as its perfect matrix. Because of our liberal freedoms (like the freedom of expression), we have difficulties recognizing the unfreedoms the economical system produces. In the case of *The Bookseller of Kabul*, apparently the book (the representation) travels more easily than the people (the represented). The capitalistic freedom of the circulation of commodities seems to be more important than the freedom of the movement of people.

⁷ When I use the name Rais, I refer to Shah Muhammed Rais. Equating the name Rais with the father of the family can be read as one form of discursive violence against the women of the family. However, as most of my narrative concentrates on his actions, and as he became *de facto* the main point of reference when the family was discussed in public, my decision can be approached as a pragmatic choice. Paradoxically, it may also help to recognize those moments when the rest of the family did speak. (I will return to this question on the speakers later in my writing.)

Literature, reading, and literacy are hoped to be means through which we could emancipate ourselves, but what if books can also imprison us? During the last years I have spent most of my daytime with books. I did my MA in comparative literature, I have worked as a copy editor for a university publisher, I write literary reviews for newspapers, I own a share of a second hand bookstore, and many people around me work in journalism or in publishing, spending maybe more time with books than with people. How free am I? Has my thesis, my working career and all the books I have read for it imprisoned me – like a PhD might imprison every student? Am I writing a PhD thesis on the conjunctures between publishing, journalism and books only because they constitute my everyday environment, which I cannot escape? Or, what to say of those people who read in the hope of social acceptance and consequently lie about their reading habits?⁸ Why do we have such books as *How to Talk About Books You Haven't Read* (Bayard 2007) if not because of a social norm that forces us to read? Did literary characters like Emma Bovary – who was addicted to popular novels – or Don Quixote – who was obsessed with books on chivalry – live richer lives because of books, or were they slaves of this peculiar mode of discourse? And finally, has *The Bookseller of Kabul* imprisoned the Afghan family, or have they, on the contrary, found a new life thanks to the book?

1.2 WHAT IS *THE BOOKSELLER OF KABUL*?

To help the reader understand the following chapters, I will here give a brief description of the book. I am well aware that by doing this I am already performing and fixing its identity much more than it deserves to be fixed: hence, I will keep the account here short, and ask the reader to be patient. All that is said here will be further elaborated in the consequent chapters.

As mentioned, the story of *The Bookseller of Kabul* started when Seierstad covered the war in Afghanistan in 2001. In Kabul she met a bookseller, and this encounter is described in the foreword to the book the following way:

“When the Taliban fell, I made for Kabul with the Northern Alliance. In a bookshop I happened upon an elegant, grey-haired man. Having spent weeks amongst gunpowder and rubble, where conversations centred on the tactics of war and military advance, it was refreshing to leaf through books --- and to talk to the interesting bookseller, an Afghan patriot who felt let down by his country time and again. --- He was a man who tried to save the art and literature of his country, while a string of dictators did their best to destroy them. I realized that he was himself a living piece of Afghan cultural

⁸ Every once in a while surveys reveal that people lie about reading a book. I have not come across any academic research on this subject. For less academic analysis, see e.g. a survey done for the World Book Day. According to the survey, one third of those asked admitted lying (Telegraph 05.03.09).

history: a history book on two feet. / One day he invited me home for an evening meal. --- When I left I said to myself: 'This is Afghanistan. How interesting it would be to write a book about his family.' The next day I called on Sultan [Rais] in his bookshop and told him my idea. 'Thank you,' was all he said. 'But it means that I have to come and live with you.' 'You are welcome.' 'I would have to go around with you, live the way you live. With you, your wives, sisters, sons.' 'You are welcome,' he repeated." (Seierstad 2004a, 1-2.)⁹

This description refers to the real life situation, which led Seierstad to move into the house of the family. Already here can be seen the centrality of books as mediators or metaphors. Seierstad found it refreshing to leaf through books, she wanted to write a book and she described Rais as a history book on two feet. As a result of this encounter, Seierstad stayed with the family for three to four months and wrote a book, in which (using pseudonyms) she described the life of family *Khan*.

The subtitle of the book is "a family drama" (Et Familiedrama), and it consists of a forward, an epilogue, and nineteen chapters. The chapters present rather separate stories, between which the perspectives change. The themes, the content, the narrating techniques, and the genre of the book have been described in several academic Master's theses (see e.g. Tønnevoll 2006, Wik 2005, Enger 2007, Tønder 2007).¹⁰ In the following, I refer to these detailed analyses of the book, instead of writing a new analysis myself. They summarise rather nicely the main themes and the techniques of the book, and by using them I also avoid giving my own perspective too much weight at this point.

According to Camilla Tønnevoll (2006), the book deals with everyday life in the family, and offers the reader an insight into the histories, feelings, and thoughts of the different family members. She writes that the interaction and conversations with the various family members have resulted in detailed narratives, which discuss such mundane tasks as housekeeping and trips to the bazaar, business and pilgrimage, wedding preparations and weddings, sex and naked human bodies, sexual abuse of minors, and a murder of a family member. Tønnevoll (2006) argues that Seierstad has focused particularly on women and their situation, and thus made women's oppression in Afghanistan the book's main theme. Mildrid Wik's (2005) general description of the book does not differ much from Tønnevoll's. According to her, most of the narratives are closely tied to the bookseller and his family. Wik notes that the book describes important and dramatic events in the life of the family, as well as their everyday

⁹ Sultan Khan is the character in the book who corresponds in real life with Shah Muhammed Rais. Even if Sultan is a literary character and Rais is not, the close correspondance will become evident in the course of this research.

¹⁰ It is worth noting that all these theses were written after the controversy had started.

duties. Woven into the stories of the family are stories that give insights to other people's destinies, and according to Wik (2005), most stories are about tragic female destinies. Similarly, according to Ingeborg Enger (2007), the book depicts the dramatic life of the family, both inside and outside the home. The reader gets a picture of both everyday life and festivities. The book is not only about the Khan family, but also other human destinies are intertwined in the narrative. She also notes, that in-between these stories are passages, which tell about Afghan culture and history. All these writers describe the book more or less as a book about the family, with references to other people and their lives. Moreover, both Tønnevold (2006) and Wik (2005) stress the central role of women in the book.

The narrating techniques and the genre of the book are already more difficult to describe. These definitions have been a matter of controversy, and no general consensus has been reached.

Some have read *The Bookseller of Kabul* as a reportage (Bech-Karlsen 19.02.09), some as a novel (Hoem 26.02.09). In her Master's thesis, Astrid Urdal (2005) has discussed the book as a reportage, which mixes fact and fiction, and some commentators have made references to new journalism (Nore 06.03.09, Bech-Karlsen 19.02.09). Amazon.com suggests that similar items can be found under categories of "Biographies & Memoirs", "History", "Literature & Fiction", as well as "Nonfiction" (figure 1 below).

Look for Similar Items by Category

[Books](#) > [Biographies & Memoirs](#) > [Ethnic & National](#)

[Books](#) > [History](#) > [Asia](#) > [Central Asia](#)

[Books](#) > [History](#) > [World](#) > [Islamic](#)

[Books](#) > [Literature & Fiction](#) > [Books & Reading](#) > [Booksellers & Bookselling](#)

[Books](#) > [Nonfiction](#) > [Politics](#)

[Books](#) > [Nonfiction](#) > [Social Sciences](#) > [Sociology](#)

Figure 1. The categories of *The Bookseller of Kabul* at Amazon.com on 19.4.2010 (Amazon 2010).

If anything, the genre of the book is problematic. For example, Tønnevold (2006, 9) addresses the problems that arise out of the claim that *The Bookseller of Kabul* is a reportage book, in which journalistic truth is presented as fiction. For her, this has been a source of confusion.

This confusion grows partly out of the debate around the book, but also out of the tension between the literary text and the foreword.¹¹ The foreword defines generic issues and the narrative techniques the following way:

“I [Seierstad] have written this book in a literary form, but it is based on real events or what was told me by people who took part in those events. When I describe thoughts and feelings, the point of departure is what people told me they thought or felt in any given situation.” (Seierstad 2004a, 3–4.)

In other words, the author defines the book *both* as a literary work and as a true story. This allowed Seierstad to write about events, which she had not seen or experienced herself, and about other people’s thoughts. Concretely, this meant above all the use of direct speech. Except for the foreword and the epilogue, neither a narrator, nor Seierstad are visible in the story, and feelings, emotions, and thoughts of characters are often presented through direct speech. For example, the inner thoughts of the son of the family are described in the following way:

“He is angry with his father who chains him to the shop while life goes on without him. / I am seventeen, he thinks. Life is over before it has even started. --- Why was I born an Afghan? I hate being an Afghan. All these pig-headed customs and traditions are slowly killing me. Respect this and respect that; I have no freedom, I can’t decide anything. Sultan is only interested in counting money from sales, he thinks. ‘He can take his books and stuff them,’ he says under his breath. He hopes no one heard him.” (Seierstad 2004a, 132–133.)

In her critical reading of the book, a Norwegian anthropologist Unni Wikan wrote that:

“The book makes extensive use of direct speech. This approach makes descriptions intimate and close. --- ‘Bookseller of Kabul’ is a broad portrayal of human beings, where many people are portrayed in rich detail. This applies not only to the bookseller and his family, but also to people outside [the family]. We get access to their innermost thoughts and feelings through the author, who makes extensive use of direct speech. Not only does she seem to have had access to people’s hearts, but apparently we get it too. The use of direct speech helps to make people and events credible: People are talking in their own words! They speak to each other and to the author! And we are with them. Or are we?”¹² (AP 29.09.03.)¹²

Wikan was not alone criticising Seierstad’s decision to blur genres and to use direct speech. A leading figure in the Norwegian journalistic association has said about Seierstad’s book that:

¹¹ By literary text I mean the text body of the book, presumably written by the author (Seierstad), excluding paratexts like forewords and epilogues. For a more precise definition of paratexts, see chapter two in this thesis.

¹² When I quote media texts that were written in some other language than English, the original versions, marked in roman numbers, can be found in the appendix 5. In these cases, the translations into English are mine.

‘It is very difficult to distinguish between journalistic reportage, the poetic writing about what people thought and felt and concrete descriptions of occurrences. --- The book is a mixture of a travel account and a fiction’ (cit. Tønder 2007).¹³ Another person in a Norwegian journalistic association said something similar: “Seierstad is absent from the text, yet she is on every page. We get to know the family members’ inner thoughts, where some are expressed through direct speech. This makes the persons and situations authentic. However, as readers, we do not know enough about her project to evaluate the book objectively.” (Cit. Tønder 2007.)

1.3 WHAT IS MY THESIS?

My thesis is first and foremost a case study on *The Bookseller of Kabul* and the controversy around it. Besides that, it is also a contemporary investigation into the question of how to do research on literature’s consequences. It approaches the book and the controversy mainly from two perspectives: from the perspective of the actor-network around the book, and from the perspective of the globally circulating object. The reasons for this division will be elaborated in the next chapter, chapter two, which discusses the theoretical framework of my thesis. It elaborates further *how* to do research on contemporary books and their consequences. As provisional answers it introduces actor-network theory inspired solutions, as well as other perspectives on material culture, and combines these two traditions with certain literary studies oriented debates.

The case is discussed mainly in chapters three and four, which are divided into subchapters. As these two chapters take different perspectives to the book, methods and data gathering is discussed at the beginning of each chapter – not in chapter two.

Chapter three concentrates on the alliances around *The Bookseller of Kabul* and on the events that led to – and were generated by – the controversy. It discusses how alliances were built, allies enrolled, and networks controlled. How did the book come into being, how did it become an international bestseller, and how did it turn into a public controversy? How did different actors conceive the book and their own roles? Because the chapter mainly rests on empirical work on the case, and because the narrative of the chapter is first and foremost driven by the case, some discussions have found their way into *interludes*. Thus, chapter three also includes interludes, which interrupt the narrative in order to introduce wider debates relevant for the

¹³ These quotations are from Tønder’s unpublished thesis, which was written in English. She asked me not to quote by names.

case study. They are short, semi-theoretical interventions into the case, and should supplement the literary review in chapter two as far as thematic treatment of relevant issues is concerned. They dig deeper into certain themes and supplement the empirical work with more historical or long term perspectives. The interludes also offer a space for my subjective interpretations. I have ended up using this unusual solution because it enables me to combine wider discussions with close descriptions of the case without detours and sidetracks. The interludes also pave the way for the concluding chapter.

Chapter four takes the perspective of the object, and concentrates on its global biography. It discusses how the alliances, described in chapter three, were manifested and could be seen in the book. It follows the trajectories of the book – and the changes it goes through – in order to understand how the book was used and how it behaved. The chapter has a dialogical relationship with the third chapter – commenting further the successfulness of different alliances and how the object bears witness to these changes. How were the changes in the alliances reflected in the object, and in its trajectories? Emphasis is put especially on the changing covers and paratexts of different international editions.

The last chapter, chapter five, returns to the wider discussions on how to do research on books, and how to conceptualise the role of *The Bookseller of Kabul* especially in relation to the war and to certain tendencies in the publishing industry. It reflects both the findings of my research and the successfulness of my methods.

2. HOW TO DO RESEARCH ON BOOKS? AN INVESTIGATION INTO ACTOR-NETWORKS, MULTISITE ETHNOGRAPHY, AND SOCIAL LIFE OF THINGS

Let us return to the beginning: how to make *The Bookseller of Kabul* tell us something of its abilities to create consequences, and to be influential – especially globally and politically? What kind of a theoretical framework would help in this task? The main frameworks I present here are those of actor-networks and social life of things – combined with a discussion on power. At the end of the chapter, I read these frameworks along with more literary studies oriented debates, concentrating on questions over authorship, paratexts, technologies of literature and control of discourses. But let's start with something more predictable, namely with Edward Said, and his writings on the Western representations of Muslims.

I begin with Said's (1983) idea that texts are *worldly*: they take place in time and space. According to Said, "to some degree they [texts] are events, and, even when they appear to deny it, they are nevertheless a part of the social world, human life, and of course the historical moments in which they are located and interpreted" (Said 1983, 4). Moreover, the "realities of power and authority --- are the realities that make texts possible, that deliver them to their readers, that solicit the attention of critics" (Said 1983, 5).

This idea that texts need to be grounded or situated, and read in relation to their historical moments, is central for the whole theoretical framework and methodology used in this thesis. In his academic breakthrough, *Orientalism* (1979), Said discusses the material investments needed for certain representations to have productive potentiality. For Said (1979, 12, 204), Orientalism was or is an apparatus of knowledge with its will-to-truth, not an "airy European fantasy about the Orient, but a created body of theory and practice in which, for many generations, there has been a considerable material investment" (Said 1979, 7). Certain imageries have become dominant and found material support, which has granted them durability. Out of this, Said formulated his central claim: *Orientalism* describes the existence of a discourse on the Orient, which is productive and also constitutive of the real Orient. Said writes: "Knowledge of the Orient, because generated out of strength, in a sense *creates* the Orient, the Oriental, and his world" (Said 1979, 40).¹⁴

¹⁴ For many, already this argument contains the most severe contradiction in Said's book (see e.g. Clifford 1988, Young 2004). As James Clifford (1988) has pointed out, Said vacillates between accepting something called the real Orient and regarding the Orient as the construct of a questionable mental operation. According to Clifford (1988), Said makes references both to French theory – for which "authenticity", "experience", "reality" and "presence" are mere rhetorical conventions – and to existential realism. Consequently, Said has difficulties deciding whether the Orient exists independently of its representations or not, and neither does he give any hints on whether something like a non-Orientalist representation of the Orient could exist. Said has been criticised for several other reasons,

These old concerns of Said are valid for my work, too, since I am interested in the productive abilities of books. Furthermore, Said's emphasis on knowledge production is useful when studying a book, which has been presented as a true story. For him, the liberal consensus which suggests "that 'true' knowledge' is fundamentally non-political --- obscures the highly if obscurely organized political circumstances obtaining when knowledge is produced" (Said 1979, 10). The production of a "true" story of an Afghan family and its circumstances are at the heart of my analysis, too. But I am by no means alone with the idea to link *The Bookseller of Kabul* to Orientalist discourse. An Iranian scholar, Fatemeh Keshavarz (2007), has claimed that the book belongs to a second generation of Orientalism. A Norwegian anthropologist Thomas Hylland-Eriksen wrote of its orientalisng temptations (*Morgenbladet* 09.01.04). At least two Norwegian Master's Theses have focused on its Orientalist tendencies (Enger 2007, Wik 2005), and other commentators have attached it to the postcolonial tradition through different concepts such as imperialist representations or the dichotomies between "us" and "them" (Melberg 2005, Tvedt 2004, Gulbrandsen 2004).

Without major difficulties, my work can be placed in the long academic discussion on the Western representations of the Other, most notably of the Muslim Other. This connects my thesis with discussions, which are often defined as postcolonial. By the term postcolonial, I refer to a rich field of work that has been concerned with the cultural legacy and conditions of colonialism and with the contemporary colonial practices. The field has been mapped, and the problematic of the terms has been debated in numerous volumes, and I feel there is no need – or even possibility – to do the same here (for introductions, see e.g. Loomba 1998, Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin 2007, Young 2004, Moore-Gilbert 1997). It is sufficient to say that my interests lie mainly in those writings that emphasise the continuity between the policies exercised by formal colonies and the contemporary cultural practices (for further discussion, see e.g. Loomba 1998).

Since Said's *Orientalism*, the field of postcolonial studies has become to incorporate various, highly complex issues that Said did not touch. My decision to make use of the teachings of material culture has, however, made me leave aside many of the postcolonial theories – not least because of the lack of space. This does not mean that, for example, Homi Bhabha's (see e.g. 2005, in particular 2005b) writings on the ambivalent relationships and identities in (post)colonial encounters could not be a fruitful platform for studying why Seierstad wrote her book and (above all) why readers read it. Neither do my choices imply that, for instance,

too, but I believe, for my purposes, Clifford's criticism is most central, as it concerns rather the theoretical problems than problems with Said's data or choice of topic (see e.g. Ahmad 1992, MacKenzie 1995).

discussions on (post)colonial or diasporic identities and transnational flows (Brah 1996, Hall 1993, Appadurai 1996) could not be suitable for understanding the role and reactions of Rais. Equally well, for example Chakrabarty's (2000) writings on how modernity figures in the (post)colonial regions, or how European thought has been used for the critique of colonizing relations, could explain Rais' behaviour. Or Spivak's (1988, 1999) writings on the subaltern, or the native informant, could easily have a more central role in a research like this. But boundaries have to be drawn somewhere: hence, in this thesis the postcolonial tradition is mainly present through Said and certain writers who concentrate on the links between feminist causes and the representations of Muslims in the West (e.g. Mohanty 1986, Yegenoglu 1998, Razack 2004, Butler 2009).

Referring to Said is natural also because of his strong tie to a certain materialist reading of Michel Foucault, something that it shares with the ANT literature. In contrast, the deconstructive approach of Spivak, or Bhabha's attachment to psychoanalysis, could offer interesting additional perspectives, but these are beyond the scope of this research. Instead, I hope to have found a productive way to draw links between material culture and Said's concerns about the worldly texts on Muslims.

Concretely, for me, this means looking at the conjunctures between a literary text and non-literary elements that get actualised. I believe this would get closer to what a discourse in its materiality would mean. For example Meyda Yegenoglu (1998, 10) has noted that the work Said started should be supplemented so that the Orient would be conceptualised as a material effect of Orientalist signification. Among other things, it should be seen as an embodiment of discursive production. This would highlight the productive nature of the discourse of Orientalism. (Ibid.) Yegenoglu's concern comes close to mine, but even she does not tell how to do this: how could research capture the process from signification to materialities?

I hope that my approach can help me to take a closer look at these points or nodes where texts and action – taking place outside texts – collide. This way I will not give a final theoretical answer to the question over the relationship between representations and the real – anymore than other commentators have – but I will look at constructive ways of doing research in their meeting points. It would be rather foolish to claim that countries, places, or people that have been called the Orient, or Afghanistan would not exist outside their representations. Certainly it would require a very strange form of ontology. But it would be equally foolish to claim, that this reality (outside texts) would be the main source on which actors base their actions. Texts do not themselves construct reality, but when different actors take up texts, we approach the mechanisms that produce and modify reality. *The Bookseller of Kabul* does not play a central role in changing Afghanistan, for sure, but by participating in the construction of interpretations and discussions on Afghanistan, it is involved in the process. These processes

need the mediation of both human and non-human actors, something which ANT is good at observing.

Actor-network theory: book as an actor-network

It is through ANT that Latour comes again into the picture. Presenting Latour in the introduction as the figure, with whom I disagree to a certain extent, is also a sign that his writings have been important for my work. ANT started to gain scholarly interest and followers in the 1980s – especially through the work of Latour, Michel Callon, and John Law.¹⁵ Having its roots in science and technology studies (STS) it can be interpreted as a response to social constructivism, which according to Timothy Mitchell (2002, 4) had led to a separation between the social and the material in a way that maintained “the absolute difference between representations and the world they represent, [between] social constructions and the reality they construct”. This critique of social constructivism echoes the concerns presented above in relation to Said’s work. Furthermore, ANT can also be seen as a reaction to such large sociological concepts as institutions, structures and organisations. (Latour 1996c). ANT opposed – what its supporters saw as reductionism, namely – explaining something that happened with a priori assumptions of the social. What happened in a society was not to be explained by an a priori existing social reality: on the contrary, immanent, empirically observable elements should explain how something we call a social can emerge. ANT’s empirical ethos has often meant fieldwork, and consequently Latour (1999, 20) has described ANT as “simply another way of being faithful to the insights of ethnomethodology: actors know what they do and we have to learn from them not only what they do, but how and why they do it”.

All this was already refreshing, but probably the most far-reaching influence of the ANT derived from its attempt to combine in the analysis *non-human* and *human* actors. Behind ANT was a wish to abandon the divide between material infrastructure and social superstructure (Latour 1991, 129). Consequently, it has put emphasis on materialities and objects as constitutive of human behaviour. For Latour (1993a), one main character of modernity has been its attempt to separate non-humans from humans – and in contrast to this, for him, it is our interaction with the things, objects and non-human entities, which makes us

¹⁵ ANT has inspired a variety of fields, but also created enormous amount of criticism (see e.g. Amsterdamska 1990, Collins & Yearley 1992, Star 1991). If the 1980s was a decade of ANT enthusiasm, the late 1990s saw a period of critical self-reflection, which peaked in 1999, when the key ANT scholars published a book called *Actor Network Theory and After* (Law & Hassard 1999). Today, many scholars look at the ANT from a critical distance (see e.g. Law 2004).

human. Thus, materialities are not to be reduced to any background or basis. As Turo-Kimmo Lehtonen (2009) writes on Latour and the new interest in materialities:

“What is common to all these fields is that, in contrast to ontological, historical or ethical materialism, attention is paid not only to the background explanations, but also to the foreground: action and experience with materialities. Matter is not behind pure human interaction. Instead, materiality is regarded as *taking part* in the interaction. Human togetherness implies being together *with things*.”¹⁶

Latour (1996a, 235) argues that social sciences have traditionally explained the relation between human sociality and things in three ways: things have been seen as tools, as infrastructure, or as projection screens. None of these perspectives present the social as something *shared* between humans and things, as something where things and humans *mediate* one another. Paradoxically, then, it is things that make human interaction specifically human. What is specifically human is sharing sociality with things.

The “social” cannot be explained without objects, because things or objects influence also human action. Artefacts, in themselves, construct the social. Latour (1996a, 235) suggests that rather than trying to bridge an imaginary gulf between individual action and structure, one should understand that objects are omnipresent in all the situations in which we are looking for meanings. Latour traces the history of this imaginary problem or gulf back to the times when the political world and the ‘objective’ world of science were separated. Since then, in our theoretical understanding, things have not been able to “serve as comrades, colleagues, partners, accomplices or associates in the weaving of social life” (ibid.). For Latour (2005, 84), a choice between social determinism and technical determinism is unrealistic, and this is why we should seek for the agency of the objects. Latour’s wish to reintroduce the object offers an intriguing way to deal with books. Stressing the material existence of the book encourages one to examine its role in human action from a new angle, as something that supports human action, but also as something without which many encounters between human beings would not be the same. Ideas would not have spread the way they have without books, and in particular, learning and education would look radically different if books did not exist.

¹⁶ According to Lehtonen (2009), the new interest in materiality was a reaction to the textual turn in social sciences in the 1980s.

This theoretical emphasis on objects in human behaviour influenced the development of the framework called ANT. Rather than a theory, ANT can be described as a method for empirical research.¹⁷

An actor-network can be described as “an interrelated set of entities that have been successfully translated or enrolled by an actor that is thereby able to borrow their force and speak or act on their behalf or with their support” (Callon, Law & Rip 1986, glossary). In an actor-network, entities and materialities are enacted and relational effects (Law 2004, 157). Thus, an actor-network refers to an unstable set of relations between heterogeneous elements. Heterogeneousness means that the actors are diverse and that they can equally well be humans or non-humans, as mentioned above.¹⁸ It is unstable because it is in a constant process of mutation as new alliances and relations get built, maintained or challenged by actors, which are mutually defined in the course of the associations between them. Consequently, the identities of the actors are formed and adjusted during and through the action. An actor-network is never complete, but rather uncertain and under negotiation. It is a process of displacements and transformations, but also of collective action. (Callon 1986a, Callon, Law & Rip 1986.)

In the analysis, not even the actors can be defined a priori. “The agents, their dimensions, and what they are and do, all depend on the morphology of the relations in which they are involved”, writes Callon (1999, 185). This point has its roots in poststructuralist theorisations of the subject, in which human beings are not understood as originating subjects with stable essences. Actors are rather conceived as being engaged in a process, where identities and roles are mutually defined and dependent on each other. Actors are not simply the sum of their parts. Rather, they are the totality of their relations with other actors.

As with the actors, neither can actions be defined a priori. When an actor acts, others proceed to action. Hence, there is no original non-mediated action – only mutually modified activities

¹⁷ I will not introduce all the concepts developed under the name of ANT, because I try not to use ANT as a ready made method but rather as a tool box from which to choose the most useful analytical tools. I use certain ANT-inspired concepts, while leaving others aside. A glossary of the key concepts can be found in Callon, Law & Rip 1986.

¹⁸ According to Latour (1996c), an actor “is a semiotic definition – an actant –, that is, something that acts or to which activity is granted by others. It implies no special motivation of human individual actors, nor of humans in general. An actant can literally be anything provided it is granted to be the source of an action”. Note that here Latour does not make a distinction between *an actor* and *an actant*, whereas later he writes (in line with structuralist literary theory) of actants as roles or functions which may figure in different forms, so that “the same actant can be made to act through the agency of” different actors (Latour 2005, 55–56). However, in most of his texts, the terms are rather interchangeable (see e.g. Latour 1993b, 199, 252–253).

between those who have relations with each other (Latour 1996a). Thus, the research attempts to reach beyond dichotomising action either as determined or as determining, as Gomart and Hennion (1999, 222) have noted. According to them, we should see how an event occurs and has “a positivity of its own which is limited neither to its origins and determinants, nor to its effects” (Gomart & Hennion 1999, 225–226). As Latour (1993a, 13) has famously written: “Nothing is, by itself, either reducible or irreducible to anything else. Never by itself, but always through the mediation of another.” In other words, focus is put on *mediations*. Accordingly, some of the most common and central activities taking place in an actor-network are *enrolments* and *translations*. According to Callon, Law and Rip (1986), enrolment means defining interrelated roles, which are not fixed nor pre-established. The method through which this is achieved is called translation (Callon 1986b). If an actor wishes to become powerful, it needs to enrol other actors through translating its interests into the language of others. Actors attribute roles, identities and interests to each other, and are mutually defined in this process where strategies can vary from seduction to violence (Callon 1986a, 24–26). This way they build *alliances* in an active process of engagement. Consequently, the concepts of alliances and allies are also central for ANT. As Latour, writes:

“an actant needs faithful allies who accept what they are told, identify itself with its cause, carry out all the functions that are defined for them, and come to its aid without hesitation when they are summoned. The search for these ideal allies occupies the space and time of those who wish to be stronger than others. As soon as an actor has found a somewhat more faithful ally, it can force another ally to become more faithful in its turn.” (Latour 1993b, 199.)

This commitment to final indefinability of elements, relations, and actors shows how the roots of ANT are in poststructuralist, or more precisely anti-essentialist, theories of the 1980s (Law 2007, 6, Latour 1999, 20). More concretely, or methodologically, this means taking the analysis from final products to production and practices (Latour 1987, 21).¹⁹ It also means analysing transformations, and what happens to statements or objects over the course of time (Latour 1987, 26–27, 59). The researcher can, for example, follow controversies that re-open something which already looked stable, and thus reveal the production behind the product. Changes and (sudden) ruptures in the alliances are important because for Latour (2005, 159), a social tie is “traceable only when it’s being modified”. Consequently, questions concerning the formation and breaking of alliances – both successful and unsuccessful – are crucial. This

¹⁹ This interest in practices has been central for pragmatists, too. Thus, my approach might resonate with literary pragmatists who analyse the meanings that people give to and the uses they make of texts. According to Roger D. Sell (1991, xxiii), literary pragmatism is interested in “social dimensions of language and literature, and is alive to the pragmatic conventions by which words in a particular milieu are usually interpreted”.

approach also helps to deal with questions over the relative stability or fixity of certain texts (or elements) against some others. According to Latour (1998, 426), along with the changes, we should observe what different mediators “choose to keep constant through transformations, and what they determine to discard”. We should “consider both the succession of hands that *transport* a statement and the succession of *transformations* undergone by that statement” (Latour 1991, 106).

Transportations and transformations bring back the issue of understanding the Orient as the material effect of Orientalist signification (Yeegenoglu 1998, 10), discussed above. In one of his seminal articles for the field of ANT, Callon (1986b, 217) detects how “scallop are transformed into larvae, the larvae into numbers, the numbers into tables and curves which represent easily transportable, reproducible, and diffusible sheets of paper”. In a similar way, this thesis tries to describe how individual women living in Afghanistan are transformed into a story by Åsne Seierstad and into a general category of Afghan women, how this story is transformed into reproducible and diffusible books, how they transform into media and coffee table discussions, and how, in the end, these discussions may transform into political opinions and agendas that influence the material Afghanistan.

This sort of ANT-inspired analysis is especially present in chapter three, which describes the processes of alliance building around the book – its production, distribution, and reception. However, the ethos of ANT can be found throughout the thesis. This can be seen, for example, in my tendency to disregard the idea that literary texts could be self-sufficient, closed entities. Thus, I will not discuss the narrative, which the book contains, as an independent entity – anymore than I have already done. I will not explain the plots, nor all the details the stories reveal. The reasons for this lie in the aforementioned Latourian idea that to determine the efficiency of any mechanism (or in my case a book) we do not look for its *intrinsic* qualities but at the transformations it undergoes in the hands of others, or relationally (Latour 1987, 258). Texts or the details of texts become efficient and effective only when other actors form alliances with them. Different parts of the narrative of *The Bookseller of Kabul* gain different levels of importance thanks to actors who assemble allies, and decide to borrow – or not to borrow – them their strengths. The same applies for the controversy. Not all the stories or arguments were equally successful, and hence, my thesis will follow these unbalances in strength to also see more clearly those fragments, which do not get discussed. As will be shown, for example, those passages in the book which deal with burqas, patriarchal dominance, sexual behaviour and arranged marriages get discussed and become more important in the actor-network than for example those chapters that analyse matriarchal power, and the book business. Similarly, in the controversy, freedom of expression is a more central

theme than immigration legislation – even if they both play a role in the course of events, and so on.

ANT is naturally only one way to conceptualise relational set of entities. Similar interests have been expressed by other theorists, some of whom have been predecessors for ANT scholars and others their colleagues. One could refer to Foucault's (1980, 194) concept of the *dispositif*, or the *apparatus*, which is a heterogeneous system of relations between, and consisting of, "discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions". It means understanding a discourse in its full materiality: every statement or a discourse needs material support. They are invested in "techniques that put them into operation", and are "preserved by the virtue of a number of supports and material techniques". (Foucault 2003, 139.) In my case, the concept of an apparatus can work as a useful horizon especially to the extent that Foucault sees the apparatus as something, which responds to a contingent, but *urgent need*. (Foucault 1980, 194–195.) Another similar concept to the ANT is that of an *assemblage*, which has been used also by actor-network theorists and which can be described as a process of recursive self-assembling of multiple determinations that are not reducible to any single logic (see e.g. Law 2004, Ong & Collier 2005, 12, DeLanda 2006). ANT vocabulary may also resonate with the older concept of *articulation* (see e.g. Laclau 1977, Laclau & Mouffe 2001, Hall 1982 & 1985), which according to Laclau and Mouffe (2001, 105), is "any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice". More broadly, articulation is also a term used by Foucault (2003) to discuss the relations between discursive and non-discursive elements.

The multi-sited social life of a book

Giving more attention to the non-humans, to the material, or to the object, can at its worst mean neglecting the human side of the story. At its best, it can mean an enriched understanding of human actions, makings, and valorisations. These latter kind of results have been achieved often through the work of anthropologists, sociologists, or researchers in cultural studies, who have concentrated on material culture.²⁰ Thus, along with the ANT vocabulary and methods, I have been inspired by other approaches on material culture. Ian Woodward (2007, 3) defines material culture as a term, which "emphasises how apparently inanimate things within the environment act on people, and are acted upon by people, for the

²⁰ The number of recent introductory handbooks and readers of material culture illustrates its growing influence in social sciences and humanities (see Hicks & Beaudry 2010, Buchli 2002, Tilley 2006, Woodward 2007).

purposes of carrying out social functions, regulating social relations and giving symbolic meaning to human activity". This has meant a more ethnographic approach to artifacts, or ethnography with a material focus. According to Woodward (2007, 4), a primary assertion of material culture studies is that "objects have the ability to signify things – or establish social meanings – on behalf of people". Objects can signify, they can become incorporated, they can facilitate, assist, and carry meanings (Woodward 2007, 4). As the terms facilitation and assistance already imply, focus on material culture can also mean a new interest in *practices*. In particular, Daniel Miller (1987, 115 & 1998, 6) has emphasised the need to approach things and materialities from the perspective of *practices* – rather than as sign systems. Moreover, Arjun Appadurai's (1986) methodological writings on *following a thing* have been a strong inspiration for me. For Appadurai (1986), it is through objects, their trajectories, and their transformations that we can best understand *human* actions. According to him, we "have to follow the things themselves, for their meanings are inscribed in their forms, their uses, their trajectories. It is only through the analysis of these trajectories that we can interpret the human transactions and calculations that enliven things" (Appadurai 1986, 5).²¹ He calls this the *social life of things*, or following a thing. Similarly, Igor Kopytoff (1986) writes on cultural biographies of things, on their careers, possibilities and uses. He is, for example, interested in asking what is considered to be an ideal career for a thing (Kopytoff 1986, 67).²²

Consequently, it is not enough to recognize that a thing (like a book) is adopted or appropriated, but the central questions are rather: how is this done, and what follows of this? Following a thing helps to take into account the different stages in the life cycle of the thing. As Scott Lash and Celia Lury (2007, 19) write about Appadurai:

"this approach does not privilege or focus on one moment in an object's life: its production, or its circulation in, for example, publicity and advertising, or its reception. ---- the notion of the biography makes it possible for us to avoid seeing the object as the outcome by which one structure out of a set of predefined forms acquires reality."

²¹ Similarly, according to Gaonkar and Povinelli (2003, 387), we should foreground the social life *of* the form rather than read social life *off* of it.

²² Appadurai (1986, 13–16) and Kopytoff (1986) are particularly interested in describing how things move in and out of a commodity state. At a certain phase in its career, a thing can be a commodity, whereas at another phase it may serve other purposes and lose its potentiality for being exchanged in the market. I will not discuss thoroughly the career of *The Bookseller of Kabul* from the commodity perspective, even though that would constitute an interesting area of research. As discussed in chapter one, books are often conceived both as highly commodified things and as sacred objects. However, in chapter four, I analyse certain practices around the book, which highlighted its commodity state.

Books are often approached this way, which Lash and Lury criticise: either from the perspective of production or reception (or less often circulation), as outcomes – and not as moving or changing set of entities.

As could be read between the lines, even when concentrating on things, Appadurai emphasises the human actions much more than Latour. Unlike Latour, Appadurai (1986) does not make ontological claims about the agency of non-human objects – he is rather interested in finding a methodology through which to comprehend better *human* behaviour. For Appadurai, following a thing is a method for comprehending human intentions and meaning making processes. He writes that “even though from a *theoretical* point of view human actors encode things with significance, from a *methodological* point of view it is the things-in-motion that illuminate their human and social context” (Appadurai 1986, 5). One can interpret this difference between Latour and Appadurai either as a strong point of disagreement, or alternatively only as a difference in emphasis. Either way, I want to stress that my thesis will not subscribe to any ontological necessities or theories on what form of existence a book can occupy. With my framework I am simply trying to find suitable methods for studying my case with all its complexities, global reach, and non-textual aspects. Even if the philosophical questions on the ontological status of non-human objects and their agency are set aside, a systematic focus on the material aspects of the everyday life should enrich our understanding of the contemporary world. Helene Buzelin (2005) has made a differentiation between a strong form of Latour, which comes close to a theory, and a weak form of Latour, which is more like a method. In this vocabulary, my approach would come closer to the weak version of Latour – which is the one Buzelin (2005, 165) found more useful when studying literary translations.²³ This way Appadurai’s influence in my thesis takes also ANT to a more methodological direction (instead of a theory of agency).²⁴

This methodological stand can be justified also by relying to historical reasons. In their book, *The Global Culture Industry: The Mediation of Things*, Lash and Lury (2004, 3–4) sketch the historical shifts behind the necessity to put more focus on objects. They describe an emergent transition from culture industry to *global* culture industry, which is characterised by the *mediation of things* (instead of representations). Consequently, culture “seeps out of the

²³ Among those who emphasise Latour’s role as a theoretician and philosopher, it is most likely Graham Harman (2009) who has gone furthest. For him, Latour’s writings articulate a metaphysics *sui generis*, which is “the most underrated philosophy of our time” (Graham 2009, 6).

²⁴ I hesitate to subscribe to the strong version of Latour not least because of the possibly conservative political implications of his thinking, and because of my uneasiness with certain contemporary tendencies in philosophy (and in cultural studies) to engage primarily with ontological problems.

superstructure and comes to infiltrate, and then take over, the infrastructure itself” (Lash & Lury 2007, 4). This argument is implicitly at the background of my work – even though my thesis does not make any claims about historical shifts in culture in general. It has a much more modest target: through examining *one book* it attempts to approach the current state of *the book* as a cultural entity. Thus, it tests the arguments of Lash and Lury on the microlevel of one globally circulating object.

Along with Appadurai, Kopytoff, Lash and Lury, motions, flows and global trajectories are also at the heart of what G. E. Marcus (1995) has called *multi-site ethnography*. Following a thing takes the researcher to different locations, and this reminds multi-site ethnography, which “moves out from the single sites and local situations of conventional ethnographic research [and] designs to examine the circulation of cultural meanings, objects, and identities in diffuse time-space”. (Marcus 1995, 96, 105.) It “is designed around chains, paths, threads, conjunctions, or juxtapositions of locations” (ibid.). For Marcus, a multi-site ethnographer can define her objects through different modes or techniques. Marcus mentions for example following people, a thing, or a metaphor, but he also includes “following the parties of conflicts” as a mode for generating a multi-sited terrain. (Ibid.) This is a tempting starting point for research on *The Bookseller of Kabul*, as the conflict and the book take me to different locations. According to Marcus (1995 & 2006), the need for multi-site research has grown out of the historical changes that have forced us to look at these aspects – for example out of increased diaspora or the globalized economy. Accordingly, we are once again not dealing with an ontological or metaphysical first principle, but rather with a method, which tries to answer to contemporary, and contingent challenges.

Marcus’ writings reflect a wider concern in anthropology to acknowledge the interconnectedness of different places. As Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson (1992, 2) have written, today it is increasingly difficult to discuss cultures in the way that traditional anthropology has done. In an anti-essentialist manner Gupta and Ferguson (1992, 16) have noted that “if we question a pre-given world of separate and discrete ‘peoples and cultures’, and see instead a difference-producing set of relations, we turn from a project of juxtaposing preexisting differences to one of exploring the construction of differences in historical process”.²⁵ My thesis explores whether *The Bookseller of Kabul* can be seen as participating in this kind of construction of cultural differences.²⁶

²⁵ Somewhat similarly, but this time in respect to time instead of space, Johannes Fabian (1983) has discussed the ways in which anthropology construes the other in terms of temporal distance or difference. “The other” is theoretically absent and outside the time of anthropology (Fabian 1983, xi). It

In this thesis, the influence of Appadurai, Marcus, Lash and Lury and those criticising discrete spaces, is most visible in chapter four, where the point of departure is the object. In that chapter, the object is made to speak and reveal also those human intentions and valuations, which are difficult to capture through interviews or through analysing public testimonies. These are, for example, hidden interests or motives, which are not said aloud. Thus, interpreting objects and their transformations as well as their trajectories supplements my approach in a way, which allows for speculation and researcher-led interpretations.

Power and ideas: from local to global and back

My descriptions of material culture and ANT have so far left one central area untouched: that of power. If I wish to understand the generative abilities of *The Bookseller of Kabul*, I should have something to say of its power and the powers behind it. How are global relations of power generated, produced, and reproduced in, or through, *The Bookseller of Kabul*?

By giving specific attention to the question of power I hope to overcome some of the shortcomings of Latour's thinking. As Benjamin Noys (2010, 85) has noted, Latour's focus on micro-generated networks may happen at the cost of any meaningful politics. According to Noys, while concentrating on the micro-level, and while treating different objects as equal, Latour ends up dismissing all the entities associated with the critical Left, and thus undermining the possibilities of intervention he claims to be opening (ibid.). I personally believe the methodological innovations of ANT (and Latour) are valuable, but this is true only if they are accompanied with a political perspective, which acknowledges some notions of power, or hegemony – and the need to work against contemporary political conditions.

In the early days of ANT, Callon (1986b) suggested that it is the term *translation* (discussed above), which works as a framework for analysing the structuring of power relationships. According to him, in the processes of translation certain entities come to control others. He writes: "Understanding what sociologists generally call power relationships means describing the way in which actors are defined, associated and simultaneously obliged to remain faithful to their alliances." (Callon 1986b, 224.) Thus, in order to describe the relations of power, we

is removed from the present of the anthropologist, so that other people are not seen as our contemporaries (1983, 143).

²⁶ Gupta and Ferguson (1992 6, 8) write that "spaces have *always* been hierarchically interconnected, instead of naturally disconnected". They point toward the permanence of these connections, but these connections can also be conceived as a consequence of historical developments. We do not need to fetishise the post-modern ideas of multiplicity, flows, de-territorialisation or the like, but as Marcus (1995, 97) has written, it is the historical changes, that force us to look at these aspects.

need to follow the actors. Later Law (1991) and Latour (1993b) emphasized the need to understand power as relational and as an *effect*.

In other words, the better your alliances are, the more powerful you are. In line with what was said above on the importance of materialities, Law argues that:

“forms or uses of power should --- be treated as relational products. --- the network of what we call ‘social’ relations is never purely social. For, though it is social, it is also and simultaneously technical, architectural, textual, and natural. --- Thus to understand the social, and, more particularly, to understand what it is that stabilises social relations to generate power effects we have --- to make sense of the way in which the ‘social’ interacts with and is constituted by these other materials.” (Law 1991, 166.)

Thus, objects and materialities are constituted by particular power relations, but they also actively construct such relations (Woodward 2007, 12). Latour (2000 & 1991) stresses the importance of materialities in stabilising power relations. According to him, the stability of a power relation, or of power effects, can be explained by exploring how they rely on, or borrow their force from, objects and materialities. Artefacts might even be the factors, which literally construct social order and make it durable or expansive, Latour (2000, 113) suggests. Accordingly, “whenever we discover a stable social relation, it is the introduction of some non-humans that accounts for this relative durability”. (Latour 1991, 111.) This stability, which is embedded in materialities, also enables governing from distance, as John Law (1986b) has described especially the uses of maps and other description devices by imperial Portugal. According to Law (1986b), one general requirement for successful imperial governance was that the interaction had to be arranged so that influence could be exerted without in turn being influenced. In other words, “periphery must respond, as it were mechanically, to the behest of centre” without changing the message, taking it to its own hands, or intervening (Law 1986b, 241).²⁷

In my research, a central role is of course given to one non-human actor, the book, or more precisely *The Bookseller of Kabul*. Has it stabilised – for its part – some power relations we call social? Equally well, however, I am interested in those statements and social relations that find their support in other durable or highly diffusible materialities like popular newspapers, web pages, or late night TV-shows.

²⁷ This can be contrasted with Bhabha’s (1985) writings on the English book, or *Bibl*: instead of fixity he stresses the displacements, distortions and dislocations that appear when a book enters a colony. However, Bhabha does also recognize how “the book figures those ideological correlatives of the Western sign – empiricism, idealism, mimeticism, monoculturalism”, and how it is presented as “universally adequate” (Bhabha 1985, 144).

The vocabulary of actor-networks stresses heterogeneity and irreducibility, but the power perspective is supposed to trace those relations that become the strongest and hence, can create the most effects.²⁸ Understanding power as relational, as an effect, as a product – rather than as something that can be possessed – is central for understanding the role of books like that of *The Bookseller of Kabul* in the field of global inequalities. According to Law, power is an effect, an end product, and something, which is exercised rather than possessed.²⁹ But it is also a capacity, and embodied in materials. For example money “is a putative store of power to act in relation to others, because it may be converted into or shape others --. It is relational, a capacity to act.” (Law 1991, 178.)³⁰ However, this should not mean reductionism: “To assume that the boss ‘has’ power is only helpful if we also ask how that power is constituted relationally” (Law 1991, 183).

Accordingly, power does not occupy any space exterior to other relations, neither is it treated with any special concepts or tools (Latour 1991, 129). On the contrary, all that has been said here on power reminds us of Foucault, who writes that:

“Relations of power are not in a position of exteriority with respect to other types of relationships (economic processes, knowledge relationships, sexual relations), but are immanent in the latter; they are the immediate effects of the divisions, inequalities, and disequilibriums which occur in the latter, and conversely they are the internal conditions of these differentiations” (Foucault 1990, 94.)

Thus, we “must not look for who has the power --- and who is deprived of it ---. We must seek rather the pattern of the modifications which the relationships of force imply by the very nature of their process” (Foucault 1990, 99). Moreover, emphasis is put on constant transformations, because relations of “power-knowledge are not static forms of distribution, they are ‘matrices of transformations’” (ibid.). Foucault’s (1990, 92–97) views challenge the notion of power as a sovereign, as a law or as a general system of domination, and on the contrary see it as something that is “produced from one moment to the next, at every point, or rather in every relation from one point to another”.

²⁸ Consequently, it should help to confront the politically problematic sides of Latour – mentioned above.

²⁹ This kind of understanding of power rests on certain Spinozian interpretations of Foucault (see e.g. Deleuze 1999, Lash 2007). These readings stress the potentials and power *to*, in contrast to the repressive power *over*.

³⁰ Here Law’s views differ slightly from those of Latour (1991, 118), according to whom power cannot be stored.

John Law (1991), in particular, has drawn explicit parallels between Foucault and ANT. According to him,

“actor-network theory can also be understood as an empirical version of post-structuralism. For instance, ‘actor-networks’ can be seen as scaled-down versions of Michel Foucault’s discourses or epistemes. Foucault asks us to attend to the productively strategic and relational character of epochal epistemes ---. The actor-network approach asks us to explore the strategic, relational, and productive character of particular, smaller-scale, heterogeneous actor-networks.” (Law 2007, 6.)³¹

With my thesis, I do not intend to make a new contribution to the debates on Foucault’s concept of power, but I wish to investigate the power of a given book as relational and as an effect of multiple and heterogeneous relations. For me, this means investigating the continuous movement between global patterns and local actions in the spirit of Foucault (1990, 100), who writes that:

“No ‘local center’, no ‘pattern of transformation’ could function if, through a series of sequences, it did not eventually enter into an over-all strategy. And inversely, no strategy could achieve comprehensive effects if it did not gain support from precise and tenuous relations serving, not as its point of application or final outcome, but as its prop and anchor point.”

These prop and anchor points are what I wish to describe and analyse. The multi-sited, ANT inspired way to follow *The Bookseller of Kabul* – and everything that moves around it – should help me to trace the movement between this one book and the wider geopolitical context of Afghanistan as a strategic arena in the war on terror. This reminds us of what Foucault (1980, 199) has said on how “the great strategies of power encrust themselves and depend for their conditions of exercise on the level of the micro-relations of power”. To put it slightly differently, the big strategies are to be approached as grounded in local micro-relations (see also Woodward 2007, 5). Hence, following the thing, and constructing a multi-sited terrain for my research, should help me to map the conjunctures between local exercises of power and, what we can call, global tendencies or even geopolitics.

Referring to strategies, geopolitical contexts, and patterns invites me to develop further one more category of actors: namely *ideas*. The movements between local relations and global patterns often appear in the form of circulating ideas. Even if emphasis is put on material culture and the object, I believe the category of ideas is also central when explaining how long term patterns and modes of behaviour emerge, or how they are spoken for. There are historically contingent, but still rather stable and durable practices, which do not exist without

³¹ The association between Foucault and ANT gives us also a link to Said – for whom Foucault’s theories of discourse were elementary.

anyone taking them forward, but on the other hand, which seem to emerge repeatedly under the name of certain shared ideas. These ideas need material support and other actors to take them forward, as ANT has taught us, but as actors they can do this in different ways. Actor-network theorists might casually refer to ideas as actors when listing different modes of actors (animals, humans, technologies etc. and ideas), but it often happens that historically lasting ideas do not play a significant role in their descriptions of networks. Most likely this is because of the genealogy of ANT: as its roots are so strongly in the attempt to challenge social constructivism and social explanations, and as ideas are de facto human-produced, the analysis often falls short when ideas should be discussed as actors.³²

However, one can think that Latour discusses the importance of ideas when explaining the emergence of scientific facts. Perhaps the most useful of his concepts in this regard is that of the *spokesperson*. For Latour (1987, 71), the “spokesperson is someone who speaks for others who, or which, do not speak”. When successful, a spokesperson “is seen not really as an individual but as the mouthpiece of many other mute phenomena”, and conversely when unsuccessful, the spokesperson “is transformed from someone who speaks for others into someone who speaks for him or herself, who represents only him or herself” (Latour 1987, 78). The need for spokespersons grows out of the fact that not all actors can speak for themselves. In this context, we can hold also ideas as these kinds of “others” which do not speak. Ideas do not speak, they need spokespersons, or objects which speak for them. Ideas often travel or move forward in chains of speakers (Latour 1991, 106). This creates continuity between geographically or temporally distant actors – and for example an Orientalist discourse can be conceived as a result of these chains. Books have played a central role in carrying forward these chains and in bringing material support for ideas – and *The Bookseller of Kabul* can be placed in this context.

Latour (1987) refers to the muteness of those actors that are spoken for, but this muteness is often a result of enrolments. As Callon (1986b, 216) has suggested, “[t]o speak for others is to first silence those in whose name we speak”. Thus, we need to follow those processes in which certain spokespersons are made and others dismissed. It often happens that a number of intermediaries need to be silenced in order for certain spokespersons, ideas or interpretations to emerge. When describing the successfulness of certain ideas and actors, also those actors that

³² Understanding the importance of ideas as actors is perhaps more necessary for me than for many STS-scholars, as I am dealing with a book – traditionally seen as a device, which can carry ideas. However, it is fair to say that Latour (2005, 55–56) discusses slightly similar concerns by making the aforementioned distinction between actors and actants, in which the term actant comes close to a function, which may act through the agency of different actors.

were not successful, or never emerged, should be recognised. According to Callon (1986b, 224), following the processes, in which actors translate their interests to the language of others, helps to explain “how a few obtain the right to express and to represent the many silent actors”.

For this reason, I believe, in my thesis the testimonies presented by individuals have to be supplemented also with discussion on discursive continuities, historical similarities and figures of speech. This hopefully makes the mute – or silenced – actors little more visible or hearable in my analysis. This is partly why my work includes interludes: they rely on scholarly literature on similar matters, and are above all sections, which should supplement the fragmentariness (or treacherousness) of the empirical work. They should form a dialogical relationship with the descriptions given in the chapters, and point towards tendencies or continuities. The interludes are also spaces where my own voice as a researcher is more explicitly present than in other parts of the chapters three and four. I have sometimes felt that when relying on the ideals of ethnomethodology, the ANT vocabulary does not take sufficiently into account the researcher as an actor. Still, it is undeniable that the researcher plays a crucial role in an actor-network when describing it and choosing what belongs to it and what does not. Consequently, I use the interludes to reveal what some of my own background assumptions have been – as I do believe they influence my writing deeply, no matter how much I have listened to the other actors.

By paying attention to ideas, or to mute actors, such as figures of speech, tropes and metonyms, and by relying on my own role as a constructor of the story especially in the interludes and in chapter four, I try to fill some of the gaps, which the mute actors have left behind. Tropes can be seen as ideas that have been successful in enrolling other actors and in building alliances, but which, nevertheless, repeatedly need someone to speak for them, to put them in use. These kind of historically (but contingently) shared tropes seem to partly challenge the immanence of an actor-network. Even if tropes become present in the network only when someone aligns with them, they nevertheless refer to a whole set of relations which are not empirically observable. Integrating these kind of shared figures, tropes, or metonymic associations into the analysis, which mainly takes place on a micro-level, is perhaps the biggest challenge I have come across in my research.

The vastness of such terms as ideas and strategies – and the need to take them into account in my analysis – brings with it one more central difficulty concerning the metaphors of networks, relations, or multi-sites. Namely, where do they end? Where or when does the social life of a thing end, or where are the limits of actor-networks? How to distinguish the sites that need to be visited from those that can be ignored?

In debates around the ANT, the limits of the network have been a recurrent topic. Marilyn Strathern (1996), in particular, has stressed the need to discuss this perspective. She writes that a “network is an apt image for describing the way one can link or enumerate disparate entities without making assumptions about level or hierarchy”. But, she argues that “[i]nterpretation must hold objects of reflection stable long enough to be of use. That holding stable may be imagined as stopping a flow or cutting into an expanse”. Thus, the question is: “How are we to bring to rest expandable narratives ---?” (Strathern 1996, 522.) Strathern suggests that ownership for example cuts networks – sometimes even hastily, as happens for example when someone patents the end result of a long research project conducted by several actors. “Ownership thereby curtails relations between persons: owners exclude those who do not belong”, writes Strathern (1996, 524). In my case, ownership (like copyrights) or legal rights (like visas and asylums) seem to work as moments which cut the flow of actors. As Rosemary J. Coombe (1998, 6, 27) has noted, the “copyrights are also “prohibitive boundaries” which “create particular cartographies for cultural agency”. In that sense, I think there are institutional or legal constraints which produce – at least temporary – closures, and these must be recognised as important places of power.

At the same time, however, I also think that – in theses like this – the actor who cuts the networks most often, and most crucially, is the researcher and the actual research task. In the end, it is me who decides which actors are mentioned, who are interviewed, and which phenomena are left outside the text. At this point it might be wise to quote Latour:

”Of course, this study is never complete. We start in the middle of things, *in media res*, pressed by our colleagues, pushed by fellowships, starved for money, strangled by deadlines. And most of the things we have been studying, we have ignored and misunderstood. --- [A]fter a few months, we are sunk in a flood of data, reports, transcripts, tables, statistics, and articles. How does one make sense of this mess as it piles up on our desks and fills countless disks with data? Sadly, it often *remains* to be written and is usually delayed. --- And when you begin to write in earnest, finally pleased with yourself, you have to sacrifice vast amounts of data that cannot fit in the small number of pages allotted to you. --- No matter how grandiose the perspective, no matter how scientific the outlook, no matter how tough the requirements, no matter how astute the advisor, the result of the inquiry – in 99% of the cases – will be a report prepared under immense duress on a topic requested by some colleagues for reasons that will remain for the most part unexplained. And that is excellent because *there is no better way.*” (Latour 2005, 123.)

In the case of a PhD, the topic is usually decided by the writer herself, but otherwise Latour’s account suits the reality of this thesis, too. I have also excluded vast amounts of data often to an extent that has felt unreasonable. On the other hand, there are also moments and actors which have caught my attention at the expense of others. These are actors which have strong relations to global inequalities, immigration, wars, and to certain extent to the capitalistic characters of publishing. They turn up in my narrative not necessarily because they are the

actors with most alliances (hence, the most powerful actors), but because I have found them interesting and important. For reasons that might be difficult to articulate beyond emotional, subjective, or affective arguments, I think that wars, immigration policies and their legitimation are important research topics in these times.

2.1 IS THIS USEFUL FOR STUDYING LITERATURE? FINDING PARALLELS IN LITERARY STUDIES.

In my introduction, I referred to the tradition of literary studies as a background that I have found restricted in its ability to deal with literature's consequences. Consequently, I have made a theoretical diversion, and found inspiration from other directions, particularly from studies on material culture. This methodology has led me – for most part – to leave the text between the covers rather unexamined. This means I will not do any close reading of the text, and only on a few occasions do I quote the text written by Seierstad. This might be difficult to understand for those trained in literary studies. After all, the driving force for many literary scholars is still the text they call a literary text, written by someone they call an author. My intention is not to say that close reading would be useless. It can reveal interesting aspects of literature, and it has its important place in the method repertoire. However, to know a text does not result in knowing how it has been produced or received. The genesis, or the reception, of a book is not a function of its text, because literary production, or reception, are not reducible to the text.³³ By mostly ignoring the text written by Seierstad, I want to emphasise all those elements, actors, phases, and texts which are often undermined in literary studies. I do so, because in this research, the question “what does the book say” is secondary to the question “what did the book do”.

My diversion from literary studies does, however, not mean that some of the issues discussed above would not have been present in literary studies disciplines. Consequently, in the following I identify some parallel debates that have their roots more firmly in studies on literature. They can be seen as secondary frameworks supplementing the more social science oriented threads. ANT grew out of science and technology studies, and literature as a historical continuity has often rested on different ideals, values, goals, and norms than science. By combining discussions on material culture with debates more familiar to the literary culture, I

³³ These articulations are borrowed from Luis Hay (1996, 207), who writes that: “it is no longer enough to know an era, a genre and a work in order to know how that work has been produced: *the method of writing* is not dependent on *what is written*, and the genesis of a work is not a function of its text.”

try to acknowledge these differences and find an approach, which would resonate with the contemporary state of the literary world.

When thinking in terms of books, similar tendencies to those presented above can be found in sociology of literature and the early Cultural Studies. Another fitting example of what I wish to do, comes from those working on the history of books, literary historians, genetic studies, or even textual scholarship. Historians working on books have explored the complex relations between material and social forces: concentrating for example on cost of production, portability, or access to information. According to historian Nicolas Jardine (2000, 400), we should in the first instance look at the workaday shufflings and shiftings of meaning brought about by translating, proof-correcting, editing, annotating, commentating, reviewing, popularising, composing textbooks, etc. – precisely those activities apt to be dismissed as mechanical, derivative, second-rate or inauthentic.³⁴ In many ways, these are also my interests. The same can be said about textual scholarship, which can be defined as “historical investigation of texts as both artifactual objects and conceptual entities, and the reconstruction of those stages in the transmission that have not survived” (Greetham 1994, ix–x). Consequently, textual scholars have been interested in collaborative production, in authorial intentions and in transformations and transmissions of texts. Many of these elements are present also in my thesis: in chapter four, I reconstruct the stages of *The Bookseller of Kabul* similarly to the textual scholars. However, their focus on text(s) rather than books (or objects, logistics, technologies etc.) and their historical emphasis, means that their work has only inspirational value for me. Similarly, my research shares some perspectives with genetic criticism, along with major differences. Genetic criticism “is mainly concerned with how texts are produced” (Deppman, Ferrer & Groden 2004, 2). It “strives to reconstruct, from all available evidence, the chain of events in a writing process” (ibid.). Also my work reconstructs in many ways the biography of *The Bookseller of Kabul*, but along with production, it is interested in reception, too. Moreover, it does not use the traditional materials of genetic research, such as writers’ notes, drafts, and proof corrections.

In the tradition of Cultural Studies, at least the legacies of cultural materialism and Raymond Williams have relevance for my research. I share their interest in the political implications of the conjunctures between texts and historical contexts – together with their support for the political commitment of researchers (Dollimore & Sinfield 1985, Wilson 1995). I join the idea of cultural materialism as far as it criticises both economic reductionism and the tendency to

³⁴ One could say that actor-network theorists have done this in relation to history, and especially to scientific writing, but not in relation to contemporary literature.

approach literature with an overemphasis on the individuals (at the expense of the social/collective). Even though my approach in this thesis derives from a very different tradition, it shares something with Williams' "fully social theory of literature" (Williams 1977, 171–172), which investigates relationships as they are "expressed, offered, tested and amended in a whole social process, in which device, expression and the substance of expression are in the end inseparable".³⁵ (Williams 1977, 171–172.) However, similarly to the traditions discussed above, Williams' writings on literature, and cultural materialism, are mainly concerned with the historical *longue durée*, something which my thesis touches on only occasionally.³⁶

The multitude of traditions named above should prove that research on literature has not fully excluded or ignored the questions I want to deal with – even though these traditions have not satisfied my theoretical and methodological wishes. More concretely, there are certain specific debates on literature, which I have found useful to weave into my theoretical framework. In the following, I discuss firstly questions over literature as networks, and secondly, authorship and collective production. Thirdly, I elaborate how this collectivity is embodied in paratexts, and how they (together with authorship) are linked to the control of discourses. And finally, I finish this chapter by discussing some current tendencies in publishing industry. This means approaching literature as goods produced by publishing business in the age of digitalisation and electronic media.

Literature as networks

ANT and multi-site research point towards networks. The idea of texts as networks has a long tradition in literary studies. Texts themselves can be described as networks of meanings, elements and relations in which the reader travels. These issues have often been discussed

³⁵ Williams' emphasis on the term social, and his use of such concepts as substance, are of course at odds with the anti-essentialist and anti-social constructivist principles of ANT. However, as I have highlighted, my use of ANT and Latour does not derive from my commitment to anti-essentialism or the denial of social explanations, but rather from my methodological interests. Moreover, if instead of social and substance, emphasis is put on Williams' word inseparable, these words get meanings, which come closer to understanding relationality as a key term.

³⁶ Moreover, the concept of articulation discussed above has also been used in studies on literature. For example Janice Radway, whose research on romance readers, *Reading the Romance* (1984), still remains one of the most interesting empirical research on literature, uses the concept of articulation. Also, the concept of social infrastructure of reading, used by Elizabeth Long (2003), may be useful to keep in mind. The concept refers to the fact that one has to be socialized into reading, but it also means the institutional and material support for individual reading, in the form of libraries, copyrights, distribution, and marketing etc.

particularly through the concepts of *textuality* or *intertextuality*, or under the loose label of poststructuralism.³⁷

According to Robert Young (1981, 8), post-structuralism sees the signifying surface (or the textuality) and “the interaction of reader and text as a productivity, the production of a multiplicity of signifying effects”. This means that a text is seen as a polysemic space, where several possible meanings intersect and where signifiers play. Text is thought to refer endlessly to something other than itself, to the outside. And above all, text is a network-like complexity, characterised by absence and presence, the movement of language. In a way (to play with the vocabulary of ANT), interest is in relations – or in the building of relations – instead of in an imagined structure behind or under relations.

For example, Roland Barthes (1981, 36–37) writes that the “text is the very theatre of a production where the producer and reader of the text meet---. Even when written (fixed), it does not stop working, maintaining a process of production.” Barthes (1971) juxtaposes a literary work to texts, and speaks strongly in favour of the latter. For him, text is “a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash” (Barthes 1981, 146). The text, according to Barthes (1971), “is experienced only in an activity of production”, it is a practice, whereas a work seeks for comprehensiveness and is approached as a fragment of substance. Rather similarly, Spivak (1976, xii) describes Jacques Derrida’s position by writing that the “text has no stable identity, no stable origin, no stable end. Each act of reading the ‘text’ is a preface to the next”.³⁸

Foucault, on the other hand, uses explicitly the word network. He points out that the “frontiers of a book are never clear-cut”, because “it is caught up in a system of references to other books, other texts, other sentences: it is a node within a network ... [a] network of references” (Foucault 2003, 25–26). The unity of the book is among the first things Foucault wants to abandon.

“The book is not simply the object that one holds in one’s hands; and it cannot remain within the little parallelepiped that contains it: its unity is variable and relative. As soon

³⁷ I am well aware of the dangers of discussing post-structuralism in passing (as already naming poststructuralist scholars is challenging), but still a short reference to post-structuralist ideas should illustrate how the idea of a network has been used in studies on literature. However, it is useful also to note that the concept of textuality can be interpreted as a barrier for understanding texts as worldly (see Said’s critique of the appropriation of Foucault and Derrida, Said 1983, 3–4).

³⁸ I have found it appropriate to quote Spivak, instead of Derrida, in order to highlight the number of mediations and mediators: Spivak’s preface to Derrida’s text can be seen as a preface for my reading of *The Bookseller of Kabul*.

as one questions that unity, it loses its self-evidence; it indicates itself, constructs itself, only on the basis of a complex field of discourse.” (Foucault 2003, 26.)

These themes have been developed further especially by scholars interested in hypertextuality. For example, Jay David Bolter (1991, 22) writes about the networked nature of texts:

“Association is always present in any text: one word echoes another; one sentence or paragraph recalls others earlier in the text and looks forward to still others. A writer cannot help but write associatively: even if he or she begins with and remains faithful to an outline, the result is always a network of verbal elements.”

Thus, the ideas of indefinabilities, relationalities and mutual dependencies, which characterise actor-networks, have been present also in studies on textuality, even though in different terms.

However, as could be read from the Foucault quotes, there has also been a strong tradition in studies on literature, which has approached texts as closed, self-sufficient unities, and post-structuralism was in many ways an attack against these views. Formalism and new criticism in particular cherished the idea that texts have an autonomy. The autonomy of a text could mean its decoupling from the process of production as well as its transformation into a material book, and its semantic detachment from its author, which creates a semantic entirety (Lehtonen 2001, 46, 214). Consequently, one can refer to a process of reification: the relations, which produced the words, vanish to the background and turn into an object. When practices around books get naturalized, the stages of production, and of subsequent reception, disappear. Fredric Jameson (2001 314–315) has referred to the “effacement of the traces of production”, which leads to a radical separation between the producers and the consumers. Accordingly, the printed word is conceived as a closure, or it is accompanied with a sense of closure, as for example Bolter (1991, 87) and Ong (2001) have noted. According to Bolter, “printing strengthened the impression of the book as a complete and closed verbal structure”, and encouraged to think of written text as an unchanging artefact (Bolter 1991, 3, 86). *The Bookseller of Kabul* has a special relation to reification, as it has been criticized for not including enough information on the process through which it was written, or on the role the author played in creating the stories (see chapter 3). On the contrary, Seierstad has effaced herself from the narrative (except from the foreword and the epilogue) giving the illusion that she did not influence the situations in which she collected her stories.³⁹

³⁹ The idea of reification can be paralleled with Latour’s (1987) figure of *black boxes*. A black box is anything whose makeup can be taken for granted for present purposes. For example, when theories reach a certain point of acceptance, we begin to treat them as true, as being black boxes rather than theories. Eventually, these black boxes become so accepted that they become invisible, and only pop into focus again when an outsider questions them. The same can be said about books: printed words are often approached as reified objects, the continuous production of which is put into brackets.

Reification, networks and textuality are closely linked to the question of who produces them – or what lurks behind the closed entity we have learned to call the book. The commonplace answer is that literary texts are produced by authors. Hence, I move on to discuss issues concerning the author – as they have figured in literary studies oriented debates.

Literature without the Author

As mentioned, among other things an actor-network is a process of collective action (Callon 1986a, Callon, Law & Rip 1986). So are books. Books usually have authors, but these authors do not produce them alone. Through my approach I bring to the forefront more actors than we are used to encounter when discussing books in modern times. It is not only the text or the author that matter, but also other materialities and humans, as well as their trajectories. This perspective is both new and familiar to discussions on literature.

In literary studies, there is a long tradition of critique against the autonomous and bourgeois author. Questions over authorship, and the author as a historical figure, would be a topic for another PhD. Thus, I will not go very deeply into the subject, but instead present a few central ideas the critics of the bourgeois author have raised. The most influential attacks have come from Barthes (1987), Foucault (1981 & 1991) and Walter Benjamin (1970). Although from different perspectives, they all have challenged the autonomous author, and the way the history of literature has constructed it. As John Stopford (1990, 184) has noted, both Barthes and Benjamin recognise in “the bourgeois author’s claim of autonomy, freedom and even theological significance as originating subject of the text --- the crucial barrier to a progressive grasp of aesthetic meaning”. Both Benjamin and Barthes present their positive alternatives to the figure of the bourgeois author. Benjamin (1970) replaces it with the producer, with someone whose position in the relations of production is a key to literary value, whereas Barthes (1987) substitutes it with the scriptor, whose function is performative, and who recycles the signs and rejects any attempts to endow the signs with theological significance (see also Stopford 1990).

Barthes (1971) writes that the author should be abolished in the name of the text as a fabric, as a productivity, and as a recycling place of signs, which cannot refer to any origin. According to Barthes (1971), it is the text, which should be taken as the metaphor for literature – against the metaphor of the literary work. For him, a text would be something which “reads without the inscription of the Father [sic, read author, or mother]”, whereas the work is something the author owns and is reputed to, and in relation to which the author’s declared intentions matter (Barthes 1971). A text could not be owned by anyone, and neither could it be legally asserted to anyone (in the form of copyrights, for example), whereas the work can be – and also is – legally asserted to the author. Barthes’ anti-theological activity culminates in the death of the

author and the permanent disappearance of the writer's ideologically sustained figure. For Barthes (1987), the dead author resurrects as scriptor, whose hand, "cut off from any voice", traces signs, but refuses to inherit or to fix meaning.

Benjamin's (1970) critique of the bourgeois author lies radically elsewhere, but like Barthes, he also wants to replace it with a new figure. He replaces the bourgeois author with author as a producer, who becomes a participant and an engineer transforming the productive apparatus. Benjamin (1970, 7) demands from the (author as a) producer a reflective positioning of him/herself in the process of production. He wants the writer not simply to reproduce the apparatus of production but to work as an engineer and adapt it to progressive aims.

Against Benjamin's and Barthes' positive alternatives, Foucault (1991, 105) has concentrated on describing the "space left empty by the author's disappearance". While dismantling the real author from his/her theological role, Foucault has described the operations of what he calls an author function. The author-function does not refer to the real writer, the individual who precedes and exists independently of the work. Instead, it refers to the author's name, which, in addition to being a proper name, is also a literary name, a name that exists only in relation to the work associated with it. The author-function, then, endows a work with a certain cultural status and value. The author function delimits what works we recognise as valuable and accords the status of an author to certain writers. The author's name serves to characterise a certain mode of being of discourse:

"the fact that the discourse has an author's name, that one can say 'this was written by so-and-so' or 'so-and-so is its author,' shows that this discourse is not ordinary everyday speech that merely comes and goes, not something that is immediately consumable". (Foucault 1981, 1991).

On the contrary, it is a speech that must be "received in a certain mode and that, in a given culture, must receive a certain status." (Foucault 1991, 107.) Foucault (1981, 63) discusses the contingent "difference between the writer and any other speaking or writing subject" and the constant need to stress a dissymmetry between creation and any use of the linguistic system. According to him, the author function delimits above all the free proliferation of meanings (Foucault 1981) – as will be discussed further below. The author "is a certain functional principle by which, in our culture, one limits, excludes, and chooses; in short, by which one impedes the free circulation, the free manipulation, the free composition, decomposition, and recomposition of fiction" (Foucault 1991, 119.)

Together these three theorists have re-imagined the role of the author beyond the subject who is autonomous and free to do whatever s/he fancies, while still maintaining an authoritative position in the processes of interpretation, and ownership of the text as a private property. In a way or another, all these theorists remove the focus from the individual author to multiples

(whether in the interest of the readers, the masses, or endlessly proliferating meanings). Barthes does this by believing in the readers' ability to endlessly produce the text, while Benjamin does it by demanding the writer to see him/herself as a producer who modifies the apparatus according to collective needs, in solidarity with the masses.

Today these discussions find their continuation in the questions about whether contemporary writing practices correspond with the traditional figure of the author. Nicolas Jardine (2000, 400), working on the history of the book, has touched the issue when writing on the author-reader dichotomy. According to him, we should "consider the production of meanings as involving transactions between authors, readers and others involved in the production and distribution of books" rather than privilege "authors as unique creators of, or authorities on, meanings", or conversely "eliminate authors in favour of autonomous texts or autonomous readers" (Jardine 2000, 400). Similarly, for example, Martha Woodmansee (1994, 15) wrote in 1994 that: "research since the appearance in 1969 of Michel Foucault's essay, *What is an Author?*, suggests not only that the author in this modern sense is a relatively recent invention, but that it does not closely reflect contemporary writing practices." Woodmansee refers to collective writing practices and writing as collective production. The growing impact of publishers, editors, ghost writers, referees and proof readers has also contributed to these changes. The information age – with the digitalisation of texts and their modifications – may slowly challenge the logic of the authorship in its traditional form. Since 1994 the discussion on the link between collective aspects of cultural, or social production and their economic and juridical appropriation has only strengthened – thanks to the growing number of legal conflicts around copyrights, patents and trademarks (see e.g. Coombe 1998).⁴⁰ According to Coombe (1998, 6), copyrights are an important point of struggle because while protecting "some activities of meaning-making under the guise of authorship" and delegitimising "other

⁴⁰ This discussion has advanced much further in science studies, and for example in the music industry, than in literature. Why is it so? The more social explanation would acknowledge that the notion of authorship is so strongly rooted in the Romantic movement in literature, and in the period when copyrights were first formulated, that ideas of individuality have occupied a central place in our understanding of literature. Foucault's (1991) analysis of the author is exemplary: literary criticism – and through that the institution of literature – has been dependent on the idea of an originating subject. A more technology-oriented explanation would concentrate on the antagonisms created by technological developments. New technologies create new antagonisms over intellectual property, but these technologies have not yet fully touched the distribution of literature. Those Marxists following the traditions of autonomists and operaismo (see e.g. Wright 2002), could remind that the dialectics of this process in literature are not yet as developed as they are in music industry. Because capital is always reactive to the desires of the labour, the enforcement of the legal regimes protecting intellectual property is a reaction to its appropriation by the collectives. This collective re-appropriation has happened in music, game, and patent industries, but literature has so far remained in the margins of these struggles – and despite some recent conflicts, it may stay there thanks to its relative unimportance in economic terms.

signifying practices as forms of piracy”, they “play a constitutive role in the creation of contemporary cultures and in the social life of interpretive practices”. For Coombe (1998, 27), copyrights are not rights as such, but rather “a generative condition and a prohibitive boundary for hegemonic articulations and subaltern practices of appropriation”. By legitimating authorship, they disregard “the contributions or interests of those others in whose lives” the different meaning-making processes figure (Coombe 1998, 8).

My approach to the book emphasises the multiple sites of its production, thus revealing what the collective production of a book can concretely mean. It describes the transactions between the author function, materialities, and the readers of *The Bookseller of Kabul*. It should help to map the space of Seierstad as an author, as an owner of the copyrights, and as the one against whom the legal charges were raised. Consequently, it should open up the process of reification. Thus, in this thesis, I end up discussing the limits of both collective production and individual’s appropriation.

Paratexts, and how they control reading

Another, rather concrete, way to approach the collective making of a book is to use Gerard Genette’s (2001) well-known concept *paratext*. With this concept, Genette referred to those texts (verbal or not) that surround, prolong, and accompany the text, which is usually regarded as the literary text. Paratexts include, for example, authors’ names, titles, covers, critiques, forewords, interviews, and illustrations. “[T]he paratext is what enables a text to become a book and to be offered as such to its readers and, more generally, to the public. More than a boundary or a sealed border, the paratext is, rather, a *threshold*” (Genette 2001, 1–2). The literary text is then the “more or less long sequence of verbal statements that are more or less endowed with significance” and which is not a paratext (Genette 2001, 1). In other words, paratexts are liminal devices that mediate the book to its readers. The sense of closure, discussed above, is produced above all through these liminal devices, because a closed entity can best be created by erecting thresholds and drawing borders (see e.g. Keskinen 1993). The word threshold should be understood as a metaphor, which refers to the liminal space which is crossed before a text, or a book is entered. Thus, the analysis of paratexts can open up this closure and reveal the processual nature of the book, showing the points or nodes where texts and action – taking place outside texts – collide.

Paratexts are often produced by someone else than the author, or in a close co-operation between the author and someone else. Editors, commentators and journalists contribute significantly to their production, which multiplies the number of actors who produce the book

to the readers. Consequently, the processual nature of books and their production becomes visible also through the labour of these different actors.⁴¹

One of the most significant categorizations Genette offers inside the concept of paratexts is the distinction between *peritexts* and *epitexts*. Genette (2001, 4–5) writes:

“A paratextual element --- necessarily has a *location* that can be situated in relation to the location of the text itself: around the text and either within the same volume or at a more respectful (or more prudent) distance. Within the same volume are such elements as the title or the preface, and sometimes elements inserted into the interstices of the text, such as chapter titles or certain notes. I will give the name *peritext* to this first spatial category ---. The distanced elements are all those messages that, at least originally, are located outside the book, generally with the help of the media (interviews, conversations) or under cover of private communications (letters, diaries, and others). This second category is what, for lack of a better word, I call *epitext* ---.”

Together these epitexts and peritexts constitute the paratexts, and throughout my thesis paratexts will be discussed extensively. They might even gain more attention than “the literary text”. Having a background in structuralism and narratology, Genette is especially interested in paratexts as literary functions asking what purpose a paratext serves. For him, paratexts are used according to conventions, but they are nevertheless always deployed in highly specific ways. Even if he is building a taxonomy of paratexts, Genette (2001, 12) notes that the functions of a paratext cannot be described a priori. A paratext can have several purposes and functions at once. I read this comment through the lens of the ANT, and hence, for me the functions of a paratext can best be described by analysing the relations it has with other actors. I believe, the functions or purposes of a paratext are not a quality of the paratext itself, but rather effects of the associations between the paratext and other actors.

In other words, paratexts can also be approached as actors: they make things happen, but in order to be powerful, they need to have alliances with other actors. They need to be made and used by someone. Peritexts need the material support of the book and the meaning making process of a reader, epitexts need other platforms which are close enough but still at a distance from the book – like newspapers, TV technology or magazines. This also helps us to take the necessary steps between the text and its contexts – as far as they can be kept separate. By observing these thresholds, it is possible to analyse the interaction between the literary text and what is located outside it.

⁴¹ Genette (2001, 16; 1991, 266) made a division between authorial and editorial paratexts, or publisher’s paratexts and author’s paratexts when asking which communicative instance produces each paratext.

Multiple actors and their roles in the production of paratexts raise a further question: who controls texts or their reception? One could say that paratexts are not only thresholds of interpretation, but also means of control. Paratexts can, namely, also point towards spaces where (authorial, editorial, or other) intentions are perhaps more observable than elsewhere in a book. According to Marie Maclean (1991), paratexts may “open a new consideration of authorial and indeed editorial and prefatorial ‘intention’”. Maclean (1991, 277–278) notes that “no one would suggest a return to the pernicious limitations imposed by the appeal to so-called authorial authority on the reading and interpretation of texts”, but nevertheless research on paratexts might direct us to such places “where the author displays intentions, where he or she speaks to the reader as sender to receiver”.⁴² Thus, the analysis of paratexts can well be a means to get information about certain wishes to direct or control the readers. Paradoxically, paratexts can be actors that give hints of both the collective action behind a book, and the authorial intentions that enliven it.

To get closer to the questions over control, I will analyse the paratexts of *The Bookseller of Kabul* also as procedures, which classify discourses internally. Here I use the framework offered by Foucault in his article “The Order of Discourse” (1981). In this famous article, Foucault writes about the rules that control the discourses in our society. He describes restrictive procedures that are external to the discourse as well as those that are internal to it, and thirdly the procedures that determine the conditions of its application. Behind this classification is Foucault’s more general pessimistic take on literature as a discourse. He writes explicitly that it “may well be that the act of writing as it is institutionalised today, in the book, the publishing-system and the person of the writer, takes place in a ‘society of discourse’, which though diffuse is certainly constraining” (Foucault 1981, 63).

The three internal restrictive procedures Foucault (1981) names are: the principle of commentary, the author principle and the principle of discipline. According to Foucault (1981), the principle of commentary, comes into being with those texts, utterances or discourses that give rise to new speech-acts, which in their turn take the “primary” utterance up, transform it and repeat it. These kind of “primary” texts, utterances or discourses are often religious or juridical, but Foucault also mentions literary texts, since they evoke new speech-

⁴² Maclean’s views rest on speech act theories, and she makes a distinction between first order and second order speech acts. In this division, the “first order would operate in natural discourse and in direct speech”, concretely mainly in paratexts. Second order acts are valid only in the framework of the narrative. (Maclean 1988, 24–25.) This distinction is rather easy to make if we refer to fiction (as the sphere of second order acts), and to paratexts (as first order acts). The difference is more difficult to keep if the non-paratextual text is also presented as truth – as is the case with *The Bookseller of Kabul*. But still this distinction can help as an analytical category also when discussing Seierstad’s book, because the person of the author is present in the foreword, backcovers, and epilogue – unlike in the text between them.

acts, like literary reviews. There is, however, a paradoxical play at work in the commentaries. The commentary allows us to say something other than the text itself, but on the condition that it is this text itself, which is said, and in a sense completed. As Foucault (1981, 58) writes, “the commentary must say for the first time what had, nonetheless, already been said, and must tirelessly repeat what had, however, never been said.” Literary reviews, and other forms of public epitexts, can be read as such commentaries. Foucault’s second restrictive procedure, the author principle (or function), was discussed above.⁴³ According to Foucault (1981), these internal restrictive procedures are above all principles of classification and ordering, and their main function is to master the element of chance or event. They ward off the free proliferation of meaning. As Foucault writes on author function (and the same applies to commentaries): “The author allows a limitation of the cancerous and dangerous proliferation of significations within a world where one is thrifty not only with one’s resources and riches, but also with one’s discourses and their significations.” (Foucault 1991, 118.) Foucault makes no references to paratexts, and neither does Genette directly discuss them from the perspective of control, but I believe the perspective can be fruitful when exploring the functions of paratexts – and especially how changes in them function. If paratexts are always thresholds to certain kind of interpretations, this means warding off other interpretations. Even if these other readings cannot be fully abolished, their effectiveness can be diminished by an intelligent use of paratexts. I will discuss these procedures throughout my thesis, but epitexts will be discussed mainly in chapters three and peritexts mainly in chapter four. In order to stay loyal to the principle of indeterminacy (according to which the function of paratexts cannot be defined a priori), I will pay attention to the observable traces the use of paratexts has left.

Literature as goods produced by the publishing industry in the late age of print

The way writing, or authorship, are institutionalised and controlled in today’s societies also points towards what can be called the conditions of literary production. Doing research on these conditions can concretely mean, for example, investigating the role of publishers. *The Bookseller of Kabul* undeniably happens in relation to publishing houses around the world. Its trajectories are both determined by, and constitutive of, the global publishing industry. In this subchapter I briefly discuss certain contemporary characteristics of this industry.⁴⁴

⁴³ I will not discuss further the third procedure, the principle of discipline, even if there might exist interesting parallels between this procedure and the concept of genre in literary studies.

⁴⁴ I use the word industry to highlight the nature of publishing primarily as private business, which produces commodities. This does not mean publishers would not produce culturally valuable products, but I find it important to remind that books are also commodities. Naturally, not-for profit publishers

In an ANT-inspired way, I approach the state of the industry mainly through my case, rather than approaching my case through the information available on the publishing industry. As mentioned, the Latourian idea is not to follow a statement or an object through a ready-existing context. We should rather follow the simultaneous production of a statement, or an object, and a context. (Latour 1991, 106.) In other words, my whole theoretical framework rests on the idea that it is the case of *The Bookseller of Kabul* which should help us understand better how books and publishing industry operate, rather than general descriptions of publishing explaining how this book operates. However, making an ANT inspired analysis of the relations between a book and its publishing process proved out to be challenging – for reasons I will explain further in the chapters on data gathering. Here it is enough to note that the publishers were the most difficult to approach as actors. They were not keen to answer my questions, and information was referred to as being confidential. Consequently, in my research the role of the publishers must often be read between the lines, from the object, or from the comments of other actors involved in the production.

To compensate the silence of the publishers, a few general words on 21st century publishing and publishing research might nevertheless be in place here – even if this might compromise some of the principles of the ANT. These remarks illustrate certain tendencies under which *The Bookseller of Kabul* operated.

Almost without exceptions, prior research on publishing has been structured so that it concentrates on publishing only in one or two countries. Global approaches are rare, leaving a significant part of current publishing processes uncovered. Most researches concentrate on local circumstances of publishing, or on a specific corner of publishing, like on academic publishing or on children's literature (see e.g. Clark & Phillips 2008, Thompson 2005, Greco 2005). Many books available on the subject are also less academic – memoirs, or books directed for those wishing to work for publishers, or hoping to publish their own books (see e.g. Schiffrin 2000, Epstein 2001). These accounts are usually either celebratory or bitter rather than analytical or critical. In addition, in recent years, a substantial part of research (or semi-academic writing) has understandably concentrated on the effects of digitalization, on e-books, and on Googlebooks (see e.g. Cope & Phillips 2006, Gomez 2008, Birkerts 1994) – leaving research on print publishing to the margins.

and publications – as well as non-mass produced books – exist, as well, but *The Bookseller of Kabul* has been published and distributed by publisher that seek economic profit in the market through selling mass-produced publications.

Thus, making comprehensive claims about the industry is difficult, but even at a risk of simplifying the reality too much, I will say a few words about tendencies in the book industry in the last few decades. As John B. Thompson (2005, 8) has written: "While we can understand the world of publishing only by understanding how specific fields of publishing work – at the same time we can also see that there are certain broader developments that have affected the world of publishing as a whole in recent years [i.e. before 2005] ---." Thompson lists four such broad developments: (1) *The growing concentration of resources* (referring mainly to mergers and acquisitions); (2) *The changing structure of markets and channels to market* (referring especially to the rise of powerful retailer chains and online retailers); (3) *The globalization of markets and publishing firms* (meaning the market space is more global as are the actors, like transnational conglomerates); and finally (4) *The impact of new technologies* (referring chiefly to digitalization). (Thompson 2005, 8.)⁴⁵ All these characteristics are present also in my case study, as will become evident in chapters three and four.

In relation to Thompson's point four, new technologies do not only affect the reproduction of books, but digitalization has also brought with it new types of discourses and paratexts. According to Genette (2001, 3),

"it is an acknowledged fact that our 'media' age has seen the proliferation of a type of discourse around texts that was unknown in the classical world --- when texts often circulated ---, in the form of manuscripts devoid of any formula of presentation."

Here, one should not fall into a naïve dichotomy, in which the current proliferation of paratexts is contrasted to the stability of the literary text in the past. Before printing technology, texts were prone to constant changes because of human mistakes or intentional modifications by those who manually copied the manuscripts. Moreover, before copyrights, the entity, which we today consider the original text, was understood more as an intellectual common, which was open for modifications. Nevertheless, the number of paratexts is obviously increasing. Marshall McLuhan (2002, 278) might have referred to this by saying that the "electric galaxy of events has already moved deeply into the Gutenberg Galaxy".

This is also a point where I feel Genette's writings need to be supplemented. The relationship between paratexts and what could be called the literary text can naturally be conceptualized in different ways. According to Genette (2001, 12), the paratexts serve the "original" literary text. He writes that "the paratext in all its forms is a discourse that is fundamentally heteronomous, auxiliary, and dedicated to the service of something other than itself that constitutes its raison

⁴⁵ These changes refer mainly to North-American and European developments. Developments in specific non-Western countries may look very different.

d'être. This something is the text" and "the paratextual element is always subordinate to 'its' text" (ibid). Genette's description offers a good starting point for analysis, because it is easy to agree that paratexts of a literary text would not exist without the literary text, but Genette's statement also reveals an unnecessarily strong emphasis on the literary text. Particularly, in the times of digitalization, and media dominated reading environments, the assumption that paratexts would fundamentally serve the literary text – and be subordinated to it – divert our thoughts from the fact that paratexts can also be subordinated to some other elements, or at least they can *derive* from other elements than the literary texts. Paratexts can for example serve other paratexts, and interact with them in productive ways, which have little to do with the so-called literary text. This is the case, for example, when a cover designer has not read the book, but only interpretations of it, or seen only other covers. Or when a logo of a famous TV-show appears on the cover of a book, it does not serve only the literary text, but also (or maybe even mainly) the TV-show and its paratexts. Its *raison d'être* can be found in the need to promote the show. This kind of relations are becoming increasingly common when same media conglomerates own publishers, newspapers, as well as radio and TV stations – all of which can promote and advertise each other's products. In this constellation, the role of paratexts, both epitextual and peritextual, needs to be reconsidered beyond Genette.

Hence, my approach seeks to pay attention in the analysis of *The Bookseller of Kabul* to the process that generates most likely the biggest changes in the field of literature since the invention of printing: in other words, digitalization and computerization. Some use the concept of the *late age of print* (Bolter 1991, Striphas 2009) to describe our current age where printing and electronic technologies mix together. As Striphas (2009, 3) writes:

"the late age of print underscores the enduring role of books in shaping habits of thought, conduct, and expression. At the same time, it draws attention to the ways in which the social, economic, and material coordinates of books have been changing in relation to other media, denser forms of industrial organization, shifting patterns of work and leisure, new laws governing commodity ownership and use, and a host of other factors."

Some say that the era of books is passing because of the rise of electronic and digital media. For Bolter (1991), the late age of print means above all the decline of the printed book and the remaking of the book by electronic technology. According to him, the printed book "seems destined to move to the margin of our literate culture" (Bolter 1991, 2–3). Bolter refers to the processes we are all witnessing in front of our computers: electronic texts have become increasingly important for those working with texts, and electronic reading and writing devices as well as activities online are changing the modes in which we read and write. Still, this does not mean that books would become obsolete (see also McGann 2001). Rather, I would here agree with Striphas (2009) who insists that the book is not dying and its time is not passing, but nevertheless we are witnessing important and even paradigmatic changes in the practices

surrounding books. Striplhas (2009, 4) neither declares a crisis nor denies major historical shifts. Moreover, he “neither rejoices in printed books” (as bibliomanics would), “nor aspires to bid them a fond farewell” (as technology enthusiasts would) (ibid.). Rather we face new phenomena that have to be taken into account in research.

For example, online stores such as Amazon, search engines, social networking tools, and their algorithms, or electronic reading devices change the ways in which we read and approach books. Amazon is building new networks around books by linking individual books to other books and by giving recommendations to the buyers. Social networking tools, or online reading groups, on the other hand, are approaching reading from new angles, and something that can be called *online reading* might be on its way.⁴⁶ Networked, digital environments alter not only the consumption practices, but increasingly also the reading experiences. They bring back into prominence the social, collective dimension of reading (as social networking tools bring readers together, and algorithms used by search-engines and online shops filter hits according to popularity). The rise of online booksellers and other online services for readers, like the social networking sites, can alter radically the way readers, publishers and books communicate with each other – at the same time as they often point towards the centralization of book markets. Juliet Gardiner (2002, 164) has written on the impact of internet bookselling on the construction of reading practices and suggested that the internet “appears to offer solutions to the most generic problems of trade bookshops world-wide: those of stock (or inventory) holdings and of trying to sell very specific products to customers whose needs and wants are, on the whole, unknown and very hard to divine”. Trade books – i.e. books intended for the general public – have traditionally been a difficult product for marketing, because outside certain niche genres, readers are difficult to categories, and their market behavior is difficult to rationalise (Gardiner 2002). The data collected online and processed through algorithms, based on collaborative filtering or recommender systems, seem to solve a significant part of this problem.⁴⁷ When consumers can be identified as constructed by the books they have already purchased, they can be offered information about other books that will consolidate their reader identities. According to Gardiner (2002, 162), “it is no longer the product that has to be marketed but consumer needs

⁴⁶ By online reading I refer to the new conjunctures between printed books and online tools (such as tagging and recommending tools, used for example by online stores) or social networking sites, which bring readers together. These kind of sites and tools encourage readers to share their views on printed books online.

⁴⁷ Collaborative filtering refers to the process of filtering information or patterns using techniques involving collaboration among multiple agents, viewpoints, data sources, etc. Recommender system refers to information filtering system techniques that attempt to recommend items that are likely to be of interest to individual users. It creates recommendations that are tailored to individuals rather than universal recommendations.

that require to be identified". In these practices, Gardiner (2002, 167) sees an attempt to commodify certain social practices around reading, like the so-called word-of-mouth phenomenon.

If we agree with Gardiner's views, we find a great need for research which also takes into account the impact of a centralised book industry, and digitalised literary market, in shaping individual reading experiences – and, in the final instance, the consequences books may generate. Publishers and booksellers do not only steer our reading through their selection of titles, but also through an increasing amount of related information attached to books (and the purchasing decision). By fostering practices such as tagging, recommending, rating, and categorising genres, they may strengthen their hold on the reading experiences. Reading a book after browsing through an Amazon-page of the book is a very different experience from reading that happens after buying the book in a physical book store or borrowing it in the library – where most often the only information available is on the object. The broader impact of these new practices to reading as a cultural phenomenon remains to be seen, and future research hopefully takes up this challenge, but something which could be called "a consuming reader" (Gardiner 2002) might be on its way. As a consequence, being vigilant towards the ways in which the publishing industry develops should be central for research.

Digitalisation is of course only one moment in the chain of technological developments that have effected the book. As technologies, also for example TV, movies and radio have influenced the role and nature of books. (See e.g. Svedjedal 2000.) Different technologies and media forms have always lived in a symbiosis with books, and digitalisation has only made these links more visible and created new scholarly interest in the matter. However, according to Johan Svedjedal (2000), literary theory has not been capable of incorporating especially the impacts of digitalisation to its analysis because of its tendency to concentrate on the printed word. Hence, the methods and concepts have developed further in other disciplines. This is why I use, above all, approaches that have been less used in studies on literature.

In media studies, some of these issues have been approached with concepts such as *remediation* and *convergence* between different media. By convergence, Henry Jenkins (2008, 2) refers to the "flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behaviour of media audiences". In my research, I will investigate how paratexts get multiplied, and what kind of relations there exists between books and other forms of media. These relations do not need to be direct flows of contents, but the interaction between so-called platforms and what could be defined as contents is a more complex one – as there is no real separation between the content and the platform, in my case for example between the story of the Afghan family and the book. The term remediation, as it has been developed for example by Bolter and Grusin (2000), tries to capture further the

processes of mutual transformations when different forms of media collide. New forms of media (like digital networking tools) borrow and refashion older forms of media (like books – even if Bolter and Grusin hardly touch the question of books). In one sense, these interactions can be interpreted as alliances and relations between entities – the way ANT would approach the encounters between books, texts, and technology. As Svedjedal (2000) has argued, literature is less and less a neatly definable entity with clear borders. On the contrary, it is diffusing into our everyday practices. Consequently, with the help of my method I should be able to bypass some persistent problems in literary or media studies – like the dichotomy between social and technological determinism, or the old problems in literary studies on whether to concentrate on text, context, reader, or author etc.

These current features are useful to keep in mind when the global routes of *The Bookseller of Kabul* are described. Seierstad's book is undeniably a global book, which has been published by several big conglomerates in-between corporate mergers. It has been sold and marketed online and by big chains, and it has appeared in different electronic formats (e-book, audio-book). But these heterogeneous practices in literature and the impacts of digitalisation do not concern only my subject matter. They concern also my own work as a researcher. Hence, a final word on my own work. Digital texts have become an everyday source especially for those doing research on global issues – and I have done my work in the middle of these developments. When I started my research in 2006, in order to get access to non-Finnish newspapers, I needed to log in to the one computer in Helsinki, which had a LexisNexis database. Through Lexisnexus, I searched how *The Bookseller of Kabul* had been discussed in the UK and US newspapers. In 2011, when I am finishing my thesis, most of these newspapers – and Norwegian newspapers – have online archives, which can be accessed from any computer with an internet connection. The abilities to follow a thing globally have exploded in just five years, bringing with it new challenges. Because these easily accessible sources are digital, they can also be easily modified or disappear (as theoretical literature on cybertexts teaches us). Hence, the questions over fixity and closure of printed texts, discussed above, concern also the process of writing a thesis in which much of the material is very unfixated. It has often happened that a reference that was there at some point in my research has disappeared. Equally well, new material is constantly available online, and for example discussion groups, blogs, or social networking sites change constantly. Referring becomes difficult and sometimes even unreliable. Also search engines and online databases have become irreplaceable tools for following the trajectories of a global book. For example, Google's image search has given me access to a number of book covers I would not have been able to view otherwise. At the same time, it also directs attention to certain actors at the expense of others. Moreover, the quality of the images found online is often poor and does not fulfil the traditional standards for a printed thesis. This leads to a situation where the researcher either

needs to ignore a vast amount of interesting data, or alternatively compromise certain established norms of academic print culture.

I have written my thesis and gathered my data in the middle of these new phenomena, which were mostly unfamiliar to those writers whose theories I use. This is why once in a while it has been difficult to define how to use these emerging tools. Thus, I can only hope that they have benefited my thesis, rather than made it less reliable or more chaotic.

3. CHANGING RELATIONS: THE BOOKSELLER OF KABUL COMES INTO BEING.

Now it is finally time to turn our attention to the case. This chapter is about relations, and the early production of *The Bookseller of Kabul* (understood in its widest sense as a process, which combines the emergence of the object, its circulation, and its reception). I will discuss three different clusters of relations: (1) the relations that existed or were needed and built before *The Bookseller of Kabul* was published, as well as the alliances that were formed immediately after the publication; (2) the relations that led to the controversy; and finally (3) the relations that unfolded when the controversy had started, and the (less publicly discussed) changes in the alliances during the years that followed. In-between this chapter, I have inserted interludes which discuss the events from a distance and in relation to debates on similar issues.

I will pay most attention to the alliances built in Norway. Through that I want to investigate some of the local prop and anchor points for a global success, as well as local potentialities for public interventions. What does it take for a Norwegian book to be successful, and what is needed for a successful Afghan intervention either locally in Norway, regionally in Europe, or globally? Even if our imaginary may be global, the realities we live in are usually very local, as are the media flows we follow. Inside and in-between the local narrative, I have woven some of the global trajectories of the book and the alliances needed for them to emerge.

To certain extent, the emphasis is on the controversy, because I approach the controversy as a chain of events through which the book and its reification was called into question – especially as a closed object. Even if the controversy as such does not alone explain what happened to the object, it contested the object and put its fixity under pressure. It was a process where the conditions of the object, its stability, and its success became little more transparent than what is customary. The transformations in the object will be discussed in chapter four, where I will discuss how the object behaved. In that sense, this chapter is also a prelude for understanding the biography of the transforming object.

3.1 METHOD AND DATA GATHERING

In this subchapter I explain the methods I used to collect the data for this chapter. Another subchapter on data gathering is located at the beginning of chapter four.

Latour (1999, 20) stresses the importance of ethnomethodology, and Marcus (1995) discusses the needs for multisite ethnography, as was explained above. Even if I cannot call my method or data gathering exactly ethnomethodology or multi-site ethnography, in order to understand the process of alliance building, I stayed for four weeks in February 2009 in Oslo collecting as

much material as possible. After this trip, I returned to Oslo twice for shorter times, in December 2009 and in June 2010. During my stay, I worked in the archives, interviewed people who had been involved in the case, and kept a fieldwork diary. In addition, some of the material discussed here comes from e-mail discussions with different persons.⁴⁸

During my first visit to Oslo I stayed as a visiting scholar at the department of social anthropology at the University of Oslo. Before I went to Norway, I had collected data about the case from different sources already for three years. These sources were mainly online sources: newspapers, and academic articles. I had read some Norwegian papers online, and I had gone systematically through the coverage of the book and the controversy during the first 18 months in the following UK and US newspapers *The Observer*, *The Guardian*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *Sunday Telegraph*, *The Sunday Times*, *The Independent*, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *Sunday Tribune*, and *The Los Angeles Times*.⁴⁹ I had restricted my focus to the UK and US papers because of their central role in the war in Afghanistan, and because of the good sales of the book in these countries. Even though these articles constitute interesting material, I will not discuss them very deeply in this thesis, because of the lack of space.

Subsequently, I had a large amount of preconceptions when I arrived to Oslo. I had also contacted several people – to whose texts I had come across when doing my research – and asked for an interview. Immediately after arriving to Oslo in February 2009, I read chronologically through all the pieces of texts that referred to *The Bookseller of Kabul*, Åsne Seierstad or the Rais family in the online archive of Norway's second biggest daily newspaper *Aftenposten* (see Chart 1 for the circulation figures).⁵⁰ I also took notes of these texts. Some of the texts had been published only online, and others also in the paper version of the newspaper. A very regrettable shortcoming of my method is that I cannot differentiate between those texts that were published in the paper and those published online. The archive did not include information on this, and thus I cannot make very detailed analysis of the circulation of each text. I do not anymore have the exact number of these texts, but I have taken notes on 176 different articles in *Aftenposten*. Consequently, *Aftenposten* was the first chronologically

⁴⁸ I continued to collect information on the case also after my first trip, although in a less systematic way. Whenever I came across an interesting or important question I sought for new information. Basically, I never finished collecting information.

⁴⁹ I originally found these articles through LexisNexis database, but as my research continued and technology developed, I could later check most of the archives online.

⁵⁰ I searched for words "Seierstad", "Rais" and "Bokhandleren i Kabul".

comprehensive source I used to map the chain of events.⁵¹ As a consequence, the discourse, which guided my research has been influenced by the *Aftenposten* more than by many other papers, although whenever *Aftenposten* referred to any other media, I checked also these sources (in Norway these included at least the following papers: *Morgenbladet*, *Dagbladet*, *Samtiden*, *Klasskampen*, *Dag og Tid*).

VG, daily	390 510
Aftenposten (morning edition), daily	263 026
Dagbladet, daily	191 164
Aftenposten (evening edition), daily	163 924
Morgenbladet	7 230
Klasskampen	6 929
Dag og Tid	6 519
Ny Tid	4 834

(As far as *Ny Tid* is concerned, in the text I refer to the year 2006, when the circulation was up to 9 258.)

Source: Medianorge (2002), which provides the media statistics for Norway.⁵²

Chart 1: The circulation of those Norwegian newspapers (in 2002), which are referred to in this thesis.

After working with *Aftenposten*'s archive, I read chronologically through articles concerning the case in *VG* as well as in a small magazine *Ny Tid* where Shah Muhammed Rais wrote. I also watched all the TV programs and listened to all the radio programs, which directly dealt with the case on the channels of Norway's national broadcasting company NRK. This means, my research does not cover other channels or stations, but NRK has both the most popular TV channel (NRK1) and radio station (NRK P1) in Norway. Altogether NRK had two TV channels when the book was launched (in 2010 it has three), and three radio stations.⁵³ In the radio archive, I searched for the programs myself with the help of their electronic database, whereas in the TV-archive the search work was done by an archive worker.

⁵¹ I chose *Aftenposten* because of its wide circulation: due to its wide reach, statements made in it had most likely more influence than those made in smaller papers or magazines. Moreover, I chose *Aftenposten* instead of the newspaper with widest circulation, *VG*, because *VG* can be described as a "yellow press" paper, thus, it lacks deeper analysis and news beyond scandals. At the same token, it needs to be noted that my thesis does not analyse carefully the possible differences between different reader segments or the varying reading strategies people may have for different papers. That kind of analysis would require different methods. My approach rather emphasises the material support and the conditions for the circulation of different messages and media texts.

⁵² Information for KK was not included in the statistics. According to its own information, the magazine has 400 000 weekly readers (KK 2009). (Note the difference between readers and circulation.)

⁵³ According to NRK, in 2010 NRK1 was the most popular TV channel in Norway, with a market share of 30 %. In the radio, NRK P1 was Norway's largest station, with more than one million listeners each day. (NRK 2010.)

All the archive material was in Norwegian. My knowledge of Norwegian is limited, as it is based mainly on my knowledge of Swedish. This means I could not speak Norwegian, but I could read and listen to conversations in media, because Swedish and Norwegian are both North Germanic languages and to a considerable extent mutually intelligible. The translations of the Norwegian media material are my own, and hence they might lack some degree of sophistication. However, I have consulted native speakers when necessary.

Before the trip or while in Norway, I contacted 33 potential interviewees, whom I call informants. After my first trip, I contacted another six persons – altogether 39 people. In addition to these individuals, whom I planned to meet, I emailed numerous persons simply to receive a small piece of information or to check a specific fact. The process, which led to the choice of informants was partly planned, and partly accidental. Some people interested me because I had read their views on the case in newspapers or magazines. Others appeared interesting because I had noticed they had played a role in the controversy or in the production of the book. Some people became informants because other informants suggested that I should interview them.⁵⁴ The people I interviewed included journalists, NGO-workers, public intellectuals, lawyers, film directors etc. In the text I refer to these interviews by using the surname of each informant and the date of the interview; a list of the informants can be found in the bibliography. The first contact was always taken by email, which was natural because everyone I wanted to approach seemed to use email. I also chose email instead of telephone, because I wanted the potential informants to have time to digest my suggestion and also because refusing my request should have been easier via email. In other words, I wanted to give the actors the possibility not to speak. Out of these 39 people, I met 21 (and conducted 20 interviews).

With those people whom I met face-to-face, I had a semi-structured discussion. In other words, I had planned some questions in advance, but in the end the conversations often led to areas that I had not intended to cover. The discussions were recorded, except for two. The interviews were made in English – in a language that was the mother tongue of neither the researcher nor the informants. However, the language did not seem to build difficult barriers between me and my informants, although its influence should not be forgotten. With the informants I discussed the particular roles each of them played, but also more generally their understandings of the

⁵⁴ In this sense, I followed Latour's (1993b, 35) idea, according to which: "We do not know who are the agents who make up our world. We must begin with this uncertainty if we are to understand how, little by little, the other agents defined one another, summoning other agents and attributing to them intentions and strategies."

book and the controversy. This way I have both details about the endeavours of these different actors, but also 20 different perspectives on the case as a whole. In addition to the 20 people I interviewed, a further twelve answered my email, but in the end I did not interview them. Only three people refused meeting me: one was referring to his/her bad health, another one to confidentiality and the third to her/his close relationship with Seierstad. Four out of the twelve replied to my first email, but not to my further messages. The remaining eight were either abroad, or too far away for me to travel, or after an email exchange it turned out that they had not played such a significant role in the events. In other words, seven people never replied to my emails or my reminders. Two of them had sat on one of the boards that had granted Seierstad awards. This might have created problems over confidentiality. From the remaining five, two worked for Seierstad's publisher, and one was her lawyer. Because of this, some of the arguments in favour of Seierstad might be underrepresented in my data, but this has been a deliberate decision of those actors who were close to her. Perhaps these actors did not think there was anything to be gained by participating in my research, whereas the others thought the opposite. Those close to Seierstad did not find a relation built with me worth the effort (or maybe worth a risk), whereas many who knew her but were not close to her were happy to speak – as were those closer to the Rais family. This can be interpreted as a sign of a relatively stable and satisfactory position of Seierstad: unlike those supporting the family, her allies did not feel that she needed spokespersons or someone further explaining the case for me.⁵⁵

The list of informants reveals one peculiarity of my data. Two persons are missing from my interview data: Åsne Seierstad and Shah Muhammed Rais. Why did I not talk to them? The decision not to interview these two actors was not obvious, but I believe necessary. In the beginning I wanted to interview them, but over the course of time I changed my mind. The reasons are multiple – and some of them point towards the weak points of my approach. First of all, as my approach tries to understand the collective making of a book, and emphasise the collective nature of production, not to include these two actors is a statement. By not interviewing the author, I try to take the spotlight away from the individualistic understanding of the author as an originating subject. By concentrating on multiple actors instead of the perspectives of the two, I wish to shift the balances of power. But even more importantly, I felt that there was not much I could get from the two adversaries. As both of them repeatedly accused publicly the other party of lying, and as they were both still in the middle of a legal

⁵⁵ I also kept a fieldwork diary, where I took notes on my discussions with sales clerks, friends, flatmates, or people at the anthropology department. It often happened that people asked me why I was in Norway, and after hearing the reason, they told me their impressions. These informal discussions pop up every now and then in my narrative, mainly when they add up to the information given by other actors. In other words, they are suggestive anecdotes, which may enrich the general picture.

dispute while I was doing my research, it would have been very difficult to know what kind of status their utterances should be given. The possibility of lying or twisting the truth because of some hidden interests is of course present in every interview and does not particularly concern only the two actors, but one can assume that these two actors had more reasons to deliberately mislead me than most others. Moreover, by the time I was conducting my interviews the public comments of both Seierstad and Rais had already become rather repetitive – as if both of them had entered a phase in the controversy where no new revelations were possible. One further reason for excluding them was a more practical one. I was not sure whether Shah Muhammed Rais would give me the interview. Seierstad would most likely have granted it, but hearing only her side would have created too much of an unbalance – both in my data and in my mind.⁵⁶

My decision not to interview Seierstad and Rais reveals some of the central shortcomings of an ANT-inspired research: the method seems to be rather unable to cope with secrets, hidden interests or unconscious behaviour. If actors know what they do, this does not mean they will share it with the researcher. The above mentioned unbalance in the alliances I managed to build points towards this problem. If ANT is supposed to give credit to the micro level – giving access to the developments of alliances between different actors – and let the actors tell what they think, what should the researcher do when some of the actors refuse to talk?⁵⁷ Or what can the analyst do, if she suspects that (human) actors might be lying or hiding some essential information? Actor-network theorists have traditionally concentrated on cases that might have been controversial in the past, but which at the time of the research are already settled and a matter of indifference. Or alternatively, they have examined cases where every party is eager to tell their side of the story. This did not happen in the case of the bookseller. Not all actors, whom I tried to interview, wanted to meet me. Moreover, some refused telling me everything they knew. The informants who were most keen to talk were those, who did not necessarily know so much about the details of the case, but who rather had a lot of opinions. They were usually also people whose personal interests were not directly involved or closely

⁵⁶ I contacted both Rais (22.02.09) and Seierstad (21.01.09) by email. Seierstad replied by saying that she is happy to give an interview (02.02.09), whereas Rais disregarded my interview request and simply wished me good luck with my research (23.02.09). The reasons I give here for excluding Rais and Seierstad apply more or less to other members of the Rais family, too.

⁵⁷ Moreover, how much does the status of the researcher determine the successfulness of the research? If I were a professor in Cultural Studies, the actors might think they could gain more by talking to me – or risk more by not talking – than what they did with a PhD student like me. Or is it the other way around: did some actors think I must be a rather harmless interviewer because of my rather low institutional status?

tied to the success of the book, or to the results of the legal dispute.

Partiality, incompleteness, and fragmentality characterise every research project, but in my case these seem to be a result of the deliberate strategies of some actors. Norway is a relatively small country with a small population (less than 5 million), and the members of the so-called intellectual elite usually know each other. The decision not to speak, or reveal everything, should be read against this background. As one person who had followed the case closely said, "this was quite a sensitive issue so it might be hard to get people to talk to you. In my experience, people were a little afraid to talk about it because the Norwegian media industry is a 'small world' where everybody knows each other". How can ANT handle this? Does the method lead to a situation where only processes where no interests are at stake can be analysed? What are the possibilities to use the method for studying highly controversial and secretive processes, like military actions or processes controlled by corporations? Relying on actors can lead to conclusions, which are easily manipulated by human actors and their potential interests or fraudulence.

One solution, often used by sociologists and anthropologists, is cross-checking, in other words letting several people discuss the same issue. In my case, cross-checking proved out to be useful at some occasions, whereas at others, there was no-one who could have given a second opinion. Neither could I rely very much on my own, subjective knowledge of the informants: unlike many anthropologists, I did not spend long time periods with my informants observing their daily habits. In contrast, I only had the information received in the interviews and in the media.

Another way to dig deeper into the non-visible or inaccessible sides of the human actors would point towards psychoanalysis, or toward such processes, which have been defined as acts of ideology. The strength of the term ideology has been in its ability to assume and speak about veiled interests as well as unsaid or unconscious motives. Moreover, if actors refuse to talk or if they reveal only part of what they think, I believe their testimonies should be accompanied with the information objects can reveal (see above and chapter 4). Among other things, the emphasis on Appadurai in chapter four is an attempt to make objects speak as actors. Objects may tell something human actors do not tell. If humans do not speak or if they lie, objects may speak. Objects and humans can also speak against each other, in which case both statements should be taken into account. For lack of a better word, this can also be called cross-checking.

And finally, in order to overcome some of the obvious pitfalls of the methodology, I believe the researcher can and should speculate. The bits and pieces assembled together through my data collecting need to be combined with previous research, with speculation, and with generalisations – as was already discussed in chapter two. In the end, it was a discussion with

one of my informants, which finally made me understand that I did not have any unmediated access to the events. This informant, who knew the case very well, refused to answer several of my questions, and instead asked me to quote her/him on a specific argument. When I disclosed my disappointment and frustration in front of such selective and secretive attitude, and said that I cannot promise to quote her/him on anything, s/he wrote me in an email: "ok, goody (and don't feel pushed from me in this case, it's exactly a good thing for someone outside Norway/Finland to analyze this case, I think you are very/too clever". All of a sudden, I understood what mediation really means. I realised that I was not dealing with the reality or the truth, but appearances, artificial testimonies and mediations.

In this sense, what follows will not explain what happened and why, but rather my text shows how the actors decided to construct the struggle publicly and later on represent it to me. My account of the events does not make any claims for full coverage, neutrality, or objectivity, but on the contrary it is a product of my interests coming together with the interests of those actors whom I managed to enrol. I obviously managed to enrol better those who were on the side of the bookseller, or whose personal interests were not closely tied to the case or the coming court case. Still, it is not a story told from the perspective of the Afghan family, far from it. Rather, it might be a story told from the perspective of those who are concerned about the biased relation between our ideals (like liberal values and freedoms) and their concretisations. But even having said this, I cannot say that my own alliances were really strong, as none of my allies remained very loyal to me. It often happened that people did not inform me about changes in the course of events, even if they knew I had an interest, and that I was partly relying on their help. For example, receiving information on the approaching court case, its dates, and finally its several postponements was not easy: my questions were either ignored, or I was not informed of changes. I lived in London and in Helsinki, and could not follow what was happening in Oslo on the everyday level. I would have needed faithful and loyal allies, but I did not have them.⁵⁸

3.2 THE EMERGENCE OF *THE BOOKSELLER OF KABUL* AND ITS EARLY RECEPTION IN NORWAY: ENGAGING EMPLOYERS, NEWSPAPERS, PUBLISHERS, AND JOURNALISTS.

In order to start describing the emergence of *The Bookseller of Kabul*, I need to take a few steps backwards. Let's take the perspective of an average Norwegian, who starts to read in the daily newspaper reports on Afghanistan in autumn 2001 written by Åsne Seierstad. This is

⁵⁸ My interaction with the informants after collecting the data is explained in appendix 1.

possible because some time in 2001 (I do not know exactly when) Seierstad had gone to Afghanistan to cover the war for a Norwegian newspaper called *Dagbladet*. This is what we learn about her time in the region from one of my informants, a former correspondent and journalist for *Dagbladet*, Jan-Erik Smilden:

“She [Seierstad] was working for the newspaper *Dagbladet* for the first months [of the invasion]. Editors were very strict about sending people, and big newspapers in Norway kept their journalists in Peshawar or Uzbekistan waiting. But Åsne had a contract as a freelancer with *Dagbladet* with a photographer (as far as I remember, it was a one month contract). But then she wanted to go to Kabul, and *Dagbladet* said no. There is a practice in *Dagbladet* that when you have been on a war zone for 14 days or 3 weeks, you go out for a week to relax. I think she had been working for a month, and the contract was subject to renewal. *Dagbladet* had a responsibility for her. So *Dagbladet* said if you want to go to Kabul now, you have to do it on your own responsibility. What happened then was that she quit with *Dagbladet*, and started to write for the newspaper *Aftenposten* instead.” (Smilden 25.02.09.)

At that time Seierstad was the only Norwegian journalist in Kabul (Aaspaas 24.02.09, AP 06.09.02b), and according to Smilden, “she did a lot of good journalism. She was very brave, willing to take more risks than the people at *Dagbladet*. Her reporting both for *Dagbladet* and *Aftenposten* was very good.” (Smilden 25.02.09) Her bravery was noticed also by other journalists: some might have been jealous of her, as a former journalist in *Aftenposten*, Kathrine Aspaas, suggested (Aaspaas 24.02.09), but others were celebrating her experiences in the war zone. In December 2001, the biggest newspaper in Norway, *VG*, published a two-page interview of Seierstad, in their “Sunday profile” series (VG 02.12.01). The title of the article was: “Rarely is one so close to death – but nothing is worth being shot”. The article discussed the dangers in Afghanistan, but it also touched Seierstad’s personality, giving a full picture of her with all her strengths (described by others) and weaknesses (described by herself). For the interview, she used the satellite telephone of the French newspaper *Le Monde*, a technology available only for few. As often in these kinds of journalistic portraits, the focus is on her exceptionality. She had managed to enrol the journalist on her side, or from another perspective, the journalist had enrolled her. Either way, the interests of the journalist met with the interests of Seierstad to such extent that the article was published. Consequently, at this point we already have a Norwegian journalist, a newspaper with wide circulation, modern communication technology, and people at *Le Monde* allied with Seierstad.

Soon after the article in *VG*, Seierstad was physically in Norway. On 14th of December 2001 she appeared on Scandinavia’s most popular TV talk show named *Først og Sist*. Most of these

Friday night shows attracted more than one million viewers.⁵⁹ The previous month she had received a Fritt Ord Honnør award (The Freedom of Expression Tribute) for her fearless and independent reportage from war zones (AP 23.11.01). She received a lot of attention, although some could say she was some sort of a national celebrity already before her work in Afghanistan. She had worked for almost every significant media in Norway, and published a book on Serbia in 2000 (Seierstad 2000). Her mother was an author of children's books as well as a known feminist, and her father was a well-known politician.

After her appearance in *Forst og Sist*, the newspaper *Dagbladet* (which was the newspaper Seierstad original wrote for while in Afghanistan) reported that Seierstad would return to Afghanistan and write a book on an Afghan family. The article mentioned three times that Seierstad had received an award for her reportage, and that five different publishers were fighting for the rights. According to the paper, she had been offered 200 000 kroner⁶⁰ just for signing the contract, but she had declined the offer. The article stated that usually the payments given in advance are far below 100 000 kroner. (DB 08.01.02.) The interest and dedication showed by the publishers already before Seierstad had even moved into the home of the family (not to mention written the text), indicates that she had good possibilities for creating strong alliances. Moreover, that *Dagbladet* reported already on this bidding round hints that Seierstad did not lack good contacts in journalism or that journalists took her as an interesting ally – even if she had left this particular newspaper and not renewed her contract.

A little more than a week later, the same paper *Dagbladet* reported that a Swedish publisher Nordstedts had bought the rights to the book, whereas Seierstad had not yet decided which Norwegian publisher she would sign the contract with. A tight publishing schedule was made public already at this point: the book was scheduled to come out in September the same year, even if Seierstad would travel to Afghanistan first in a few weeks. (DB 16.01.02.) She had managed to engage a foreign publisher before even collecting the material for the text. This also means it had been decided already in advance, for how long it would take to learn the story of the family. The temporality of the encounter had been framed before she moved into the home of the family. Consequently, the actors inside the process had to work fast. As the Swedish cover designer said in my e-mail interview: “Normally you design the book covers at least half a year before the book is published but this was made just a few months in advance

⁵⁹ These figures are from the broadcaster (NRK.no 27.03.07).

⁶⁰ On 05.01.11, around 25 000 euros.

due to the fact that the book was to come out as quickly as possible to remain current” (Acedo 12.10.09).

From then on, the book project appeared every now and then in the Norwegian newspapers. In February 2002, more than six months before the book was published, *Aftenposten* listed forthcoming books of different publishers: Seierstad’s book was named *Vår I støv. Reiseskildring fra Afghanistan* (in English, *Spring in Dust. A Travelogue from Afghanistan*) (AP 10.06.02). The same month *VG* reported that Seierstad was writing a book in Kabul as a guest of a family (VG 14.02.02). According to this article, the book was to be published by the Norwegian publisher Cappelen. The bidding round had come to an end, but the terms of the contract were not discussed. In the interview, Seierstad named the father of the family as Shah Muhammed, and she herself was portrayed as the reporter who risked her life while reporting the war.

These developments, while not being extraordinary, still pave the way for future alliances. Seierstad had strong alliances and publicity already before the text was written. Several actors were engaged: translators, cover designers, editors, and journalists. In Norway, the strength of her alliances was embodied also in the fact that her editor was Anders Heger, who is according to Wikipedia.com “the most powerful man in the book publishing industry in Norway” (Wikipedia Heger 2008).

These relations were strong enough to hold, and exactly as planned, *Bokhandleren I Kabul* was published on 2nd of September 2002 in Norway, and later that month in Sweden. The previously announced name “Spring in Dust. A Travelogue from Afghanistan”, had changed dramatically, and the new title put emphasis on the individual bookseller, instead of the country. The book was published even if things could have unfolded differently. According to information I heard from different anonymous sources, the publisher had given the manuscript to an outside “referee” or a consultant (with strong knowledge of Afghanistan) who had said the book should not be published – at least not without modifications. The relations between the author, the text and the publisher, however, turned out to be so durable that even an invited opinion of an outside consultant was not able to break or twist it. Following Latour (1991, 126), the relative durability of Seierstad’s position can be explained by the convergence between what she expected others to do and what others expected her to do. The referee was invited to be part of the process, but this person did not manage to enrol the publisher, and stop the book from appearing in public. The name of the referee was made public a year later, when a newspaper *Klassekampen* (02.09.03) revealed that she was Elisabeth Eide, an author and academic specialized in Afghanistan. In the newspaper article, she did not want to comment on her work. Later, in June 2010, I met her, but she did not wish to discuss her role and work as a

referee with me. At that time she sat in the board of Norwegian PEN together with Seierstad's publisher Heger.

Media reception in Norway

The first articles on *The Bookseller of Kabul* in the Norwegian media did not only – or not even mainly – discuss the literary text. At least as much as these articles dealt with what was found between the covers, they discussed the book and Afghanistan with the author, and quoted her opinions. In chapter two, I discussed the growing proliferation of paratexts, and how it is accompanied by the declining importance of the so-called literary text. This is what happened when *The Bookseller of Kabul* was reviewed in the big Norwegian papers: the literary text did not play a central role in the articles, and this strengthened the role of the author in the paratexts. It also might have advanced the sales, because according to Svedjedal (2000, 31), the best way for a book to gain attention is to move out from the sphere of literary critics into the news genre. *The Bookseller of Kabul* managed to do this: it was discussed not only as a text but also as a news event.

In the spirit of collective making of a book – exemplified by the movements of the actor-network – in the following I analyse how certain journalists re-constructed the book in their writings. I will first take the examples of *Aftenposten* and *VG*: because of their wide circulation, they can be thought of having the largest number of alliances between the newspaper journalist and potential readers of the book in Norway. Through this, I investigate how some of the most influential public interpretations of the book took it to certain directions. After that, I will discuss TV, radio and other institutional reception as well as those margins that went against the grain.

Aftenposten noticed the launch of the book by publishing both a review (AP 06.09.02a), and an interview with the author (AP 06.09.02b). The author received an opportunity to offer her first reading or interpretation of the text to the readers. From the perspective of enrolments, the readers were thus approached so that an alliance could be formed outside the reading experience of the book. This outside was occupied by a journalist mediating the words of the author, as the interview was given more space than the review and it was titled: “Five Months with a Burqa” (AP 06.09.02b).ⁱⁱ⁶¹

⁶¹ The term *burqa* often refers to a garment, which covers the woman completely, including the eyes. *Hijab*, on the other hand, usually means a headscarf in general. However, the uses of these words may vary according to the context. In this thesis, the word veil is used to refer to all forms of veiling/covering, whereas the term *burqa* refers to the full-body covering including a concealing net or

The opening sentence reminded the reader how Seierstad had been the only Norwegian journalist reporting the war the previous year. Her authority over Afghan issues inside Norway, in other words, was difficult to challenge. In the article, the word slave was used to describe one woman in the family, and burqas were discussed at length. Seierstad herself told in the interview that she had worked in the same way as an anthropologist. (AP 06.09.02b.)

The style of the review did not differ significantly from the style of the interview. It, too, was rather descriptive than evaluative, introducing the topics of the book, women's oppression being named as the most important. The reviewer, Gunnar Filseth, was a former correspondent to Afghanistan. He wrote that "the author knows her Afghan culture history and treats the topic with nuance". The book was described as a "steaming fresh piece of contemporary history, where last year's events, updated until the summer of 2002, merged into and linked to the lives of the bookseller's diverse family".ⁱⁱⁱ This authoritative account of Afghanistan offered by Seierstad was linked to an analysis of the Afghan situation, when the reviewer wrote:

"There has been an easy tendency to put all the blame on Taliban, but the new rulers are also fundamentalists. The West considered burqas, veiling from top to toe, as a symbol of Taliban compulsion. But it was not the Taliban who designed or made up the burqa. It was there long before the Taliban, and will be there long after the superfundamentalists are gone."^{iv}

Moreover, unveiling is referred to as something, which takes courage.^v To read this little differently, according to the reviewer, it was not the father of the family, or not even the Taliban who are responsible for the oppression, but instead an old culture, which is likely to be there also in the future. The temporality of the practice of using a burqa is constructed through the terms "long before" and "long after", thus leaving little space for changes or possibilities for change. This argumentation is very similar to the one that was more than a year later used in the review in *The New York Times*. This review stated that:

"Seierstad is hardly the first person to point out that women have suffered in Afghanistan. But her book is a timely reminder that the famously misogynist Taliban were only an extreme manifestation of a basic reality: as in many traditional societies, Afghan women have remained structurally subordinate to Afghan men no matter which government happens to be in power." (NYT 21.12.03.)

These reviews draw a link from one family to a general understanding of the country. The actor-network around the book quickly started to discuss the entire country through *The Bookseller of Kabul* – even if the foreword to the book warns the reader not to take the family as a representative of the country: "It is important to emphasize that this is the story of *one*

grille for the eyes. In Afghanistan, the latter can also be called *chadri*. Individual actors, media sources or informants, quoted in this thesis, may of course use the words with different emphases.

Afghan family. There are many millions of others. My family is not even typical. --- I did not choose my family because I wanted it to represent all other families but because it inspired me.” (Seierstad 2004a, 7.) Thus, different actors took the book to a direction which was explicitly contested by one of the central peritexts, the forward.

In the *Aftenposten* review, the fundamentalist fate of Afghanistan was combined with a West, which has now remembered Afghanistan, since Afghanistan is described as a country that was “long forgotten by the West” (AP 06.09.02a). Same kind of an attitude could be found in the text of Knut Hoem, a radio journalist at the national broadcasting company NRK P2, who reviewed the book. He wrote that the stories in the book “give us a wonderful and educative contemporary image of a country that was again discovered by West in a tragic and liberating way after September 11” (NRK.no 12.09.02).⁶² This idea of a country forgotten by the West and now being remembered or discovered is also present in the book: “The Taliban systematically razed many of the villages when they tried to subdue the last part of the country [...]. They might have made it had September 11 not happened and the world started to care about Afghanistan.” (Seierstad 2004a, 139.) When claiming that the “world” or the “West” had not cared for Afghanistan previously, these sentences exclude the role of the USA in equipping *mujahideens*, the Islamist fighters, during the Soviet war between 1979–1989, as well as the strategic interests of this “caring”. It is well known that the USA supported the *mujahideens*, and much of this aid was channelled to the resistance movements through Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) agency – but this is not said when the reviewer writes that Afghanistan is a country “long forgotten by the West”. (See e.g. Gregory 2004, 35–36, Prados 2002, Hartman 2002, Kuperman 1999.) Forgotten is also the history of Afghanistan in 1970s, when it had secular governments with rather liberal gender policies (see e.g. Moghadam 1989).⁶³ This past is partly touched upon in the literary text, but not in these epitexts.⁶⁴ The *Aftenposten* and NRK reviews built associations with the book which emphasised truthful narration, the caring role of the West, and the idea of an Afghan evil, which exists independently of regimes. However, equally well the reviews could have been attentive to the fictional features of *The Bookseller of Kabul*, to West’s self-interest in Afghanistan, and to the differences between the Taliban and the regimes of the 1970s. By emphasising the first set of

⁶² Hoem was later an important ally for Seierstad, as he wrote a “Writer’s guide” about her for schools (Hoem 2004), and also supported her for an award in Norway (Hoem 26.02.09).

⁶³ This does not mean that these governments were democratic or anti-authoritarian, but in terms of gender issues, they differed from the succeeding governments.

⁶⁴ The text, for example, says that when the Hotel Intercontinental in Kabul was built in the 1960s: “The foyer was bustling with men in elegant suits and women in short skirts and modern hairdos. --- The sixties and seventies were characterised by Kabul’s most liberal regimes ---.” (Seierstad 2004, 200.)

perspectives, the review strengthened the alliance between the book and those political readings, which see the Western presence in the country as a blessing. This was done at the expense of those readings, which could have interpreted it for example as a family drama consisting of personal disagreements.

The *Aftenposten* reviewer, Filseth, was by no means the only commentator to take the book into a direction that emphasised its general importance as a document on Afghanistan. Also for example, the above mentioned Knut Hoem saw the book as “superb contemporary history writing by literary means” (NRK.no 12.09.02).^{65vii} These readers, collectively making the book, built a path from *The Bookseller of Kabul* to a country in war in which Norway has military troops – even if they referred to this war as an act of remembering or caring of Afghanistan.

A day after the articles in *Aftenposten*, *VG* published an article on Seierstad’s book and her stay in the family, with pictures of the female family members (VG 07.09.02). (One can only speculate whether they were asked for permission when the pictures were published.) The same journalist had written the aforementioned portrait of Seierstad for the same paper ten months before (VG 02.12.01). One more alliance had held!

In this article, in contrast to the *VG*-article published in February (VG 14.2.2002), the names of the family members had been changed into the names of the literary characters. The people had become literary characters, and their voices were heard through the mediation of the book. But the pictures represented the real people. In the article, the book was strongly framed by the author herself as a story about female oppression. The opening sentence of the article was almost poetic: “Sharifa, Sonya, Leila, Shakila, Bulbula and Bibi Gul. Mothers, daughters, and sisters of Kabul. Women who continue to live in a tradition of centuries of primitive oppression.”^{viii} Also here oppression was represented as a centuries long tradition. Like in *Aftenposten*, also in *VG*’s article, the practice of using the burqa was discussed in length, and one woman in the family was described as “a modern slave in an extremely archaic society”.^{ix} A picture portrayed this woman in a window, behind bars, with a text below saying: “Modern slave”. (Figure 2.) (VG 07.09.02)

⁶⁵ Or to be precise, this quote is from the caption, which might have been written by the editor instead of Hoem.



MODERNE SLAVE: Som yngste datter i huset må Leila slite for mennes velvære, nesten døgnet rundt. Hun som hadde helt andre drømmer.

Figure 2. The illustration used in VG on 07.09.2003. The caption states: "A modern slave. As the youngest daughter of the family Leila must struggle for the well-being of men almost around the clock. She who had completely other dreams."

The women of the family are identified as slaves also in the book, as for example in the following passage describing the women of the family in hammam:

"The women are now spotlessly clean under the burqas and the clothes, but the soft soap and the pink shampoo desperately fight against heavy odds. The women's own smell is soon restored; the burqas force it down over them. The smell of old slave, young slave." (Seierstad 2004a, 168.)

The VG article included long extracts from the book, and it was titled "Daughters of Kabul" (VG 07.09.02). However, none of these "daughters" were interviewed or quoted, no woman from Kabul had her voice present in the article. To mention this detail does not imply that I would believe in a possibility of directly and truthfully representing an authentic voice of the Other; it does not imply a simple belief in a transparent and unmediated representation via quotes. There are far too many theoretical problems that would need to be solved or reservations that would need to be made before one could make such a suggestion. (See e.g. Spivak 1988 and interlude III.) Rather, the absence of the quotes from the article highlights the opposite belief which characterizes the narrative of the book itself. As mentioned in the introduction, the book makes extensive use of direct speech. Direct speech is used in the book, but not in the articles where these "daughters" are introduced to the wider public, and this

made it easier for the book and the author to work as sources for generalisations on Afghanistan.

In the *VG* article, the passage from the singular characters in the book (who were described in the published extracts) to the generality of the archaic and primitive culture was easily done, and the passage from one family to a whole society was authorized by the author herself. Seierstad said: “A woman’s life in Afghanistan is extreme. She will be given a life that others have decided she will live.”^x (VG 07.09.02.) The author, the book, and the article all spread the same image of Afghan women, and the women of the family as people who cannot decide for themselves, or who are slaves. Both Seierstad and the journalist worked as spokespersons for this view, whereas the materialities of the book and the newspaper supported the view and made it diffusible. However, none of those spokespersons that found support from the circulating materialities were Afghan women or members of the family. These material objects were made mainly for Norwegian use, and the spokespersons were also Norwegians.

These kinds of interviews can also be approached as moments when the author enrolls future readers to both buy the book and read it in a specific way. Seierstad’s words suggest that these women in Afghanistan are not free and independent; they are not subjects, hardly even agents of their lives. On the contrary, there are some people (“others”) who decide for them. Seierstad and the article refer to Sultan Khan, and more generally to Afghan men, or Afghan traditions. However, this sentence starts to gain new meanings after we learn what later happened to the family: the women moved out of Afghanistan, and one of them became involved in a court case that has lasted for years. The one who decides for these women is not only the father of the family, but also the author who wrote the book, or the Norwegian journalists who went to look for Rais after the release of the book. Or the decision to move can also be influenced by Western military troops, who will most likely be kept in the area for years to come. If we follow ANT, we see that the lives of these women (just as any other people) are mutually defined in the interaction between several forces and actors, one forceful and contingent actor being the author herself.

Only a few days after these first articles about the book, Shah Muhammed Rais entered the Norwegian public sphere for the first time. *Dagbladet* published an article for which journalist Jan-Erik Smilden had interviewed Rais in Kabul (DB 11.9.02). Smilden happened to be in the region when the book was published, and someone at *Dagbladet* faxed him extracts from the book (Smilden 25.02.09). Smilden knew Rais already from his former trips to Afghanistan, and he had “two shelves of books at home bought from Shah Muhammed” (Smilden 25.02.09). Thus, it was not difficult for him to find the person behind the literary character – even if the names had been changed. Rais was not an unknown figure among Westerners. Because he was one of the few in Kabul to sell Western books, and because his shop was in

the Intercontinental Hotel popular among journalists, many knew him well, already before *The Bookseller of Kabul* (Raanes 16.02.09, Smilden 25.02.09, Rustad 05.03.09, Judah 15.02.10).

The title of Smilden's article was "Åsne is in any case my friend, but she is wrong" (DB 11.09.02). About the book, Rais did not seem to be too angry. He even said that "if there is something negative in my family, I am not worried if it comes out. It will guide me to the right track. If you keep things secret, things will only go wrong" (DB 11.09.02).ⁿⁱ The article concentrated mainly on Rais' patriarchal habits, sex life, and even on his custom to hit the women in the family. He is quoted as saying: "I am the head of the family. --- I can slap them [other members of the family], both men and women. Yesterday I gave my wife a real blow because she talked too hard to our eighteen months old daughter."ⁿⁱⁱ

Not much fury came out of this article. The main reason, according to the journalist, was most likely that neither he nor Rais had read the book by then. "I hadn't read it when I talked with him. I had a resume, faxes and emails. I read it first after I came home", said Smilden. Had they known the content of the book, Rais' "reactions would of course have been much harder", Smilden assumed. (Smilden 25.02.09.) As becomes later apparent in my analysis, reading the text is not a precondition for intervening in the process. Smilden's article is a brilliant example of the declining importance of the literary text vis a vis paratexts: the paratext-producers do not even need the original literary text when paratexts are written. Already at this point new public actors were enrolled without them necessarily having a relation to the entire text between the covers.

When Smilden's article was published, some readers of *Dagbladet* might have already read the book, while others did not know anything of its content. Those who knew the book, could compare Smilden's descriptions to those in the book. In the book, Rais is described both as a liberal businessman, and as a domestic patriarch. According to the book, Sultan had been in prison because of selling illegal books:

"The soldiers had often menaced him, seized a few books and then left. Threats had been issued from the Taliban's highest authority and he had even been called in to the Minister for Culture, in the Government's attempts to try and convert the enterprising bookseller and recruit him to the Taliban cause. / Sultan Khan willingly sold some Taliban publications. He was a freethinker and of the opinion that everyone had the right to be heard." (Seierstad 2004a, 18–19.)

But in contrast to this image, the book describes also the less liberal sides of Shah Muhammed Rais. For example, it alleges Sultan saying about Salman Rushdie that he "is trying to destroy our soul and he must be stopped before he corrupts others too." (Seierstad 2004a, 68.) He is referred to as the "master" of his wife, whom he has forced to live in Pakistan "because it suits

Sultan” (Seierstad 2004a, 32), as someone who humiliates his wife by taking another wife (Seierstad 2004a, 15), and as a father who took his son out of school and made him work in his bookshop (Seierstad 2004a, 135). According to the book, the son has “accumulated hatred against” Sultan (Seierstad 2004a, 135), and his wife sometimes “hates him for having ruined her life ---, shamed her in the eyes of the world” (Seierstad 2004a, 32). Examples of Rais’ dual nature are numerous in the book, and Smilden’s article, thus, offered more or less the same ambiguous picture of Rais.

In my interview, Smilden criticised Seierstad for exposing Rais, but he did not think his own article exposed the family. He said: “Many things Åsne is writing about are important, but the biggest problem is that she is exposing the family. Everyone knows who he is.” (Smilden 25.02.09.) About his own article, where he cracked the anonymity of Rais, he said: “Maybe I was the first one to write about him in Norway, but he was known by so many people. It couldn’t have been kept a secret. It was impossible.” (Smilden 25.02.09.)

Smilden’s article drew a rather negative picture of Rais even if it can be read as an attempt to give Rais a voice. Smilden was, however, very sure of his motivations and also of the possible consequences of his text. In my interview he said:

“As a journalist your motivation is to get a good story, and it was a good story to interview him. That was my first motivation. At the same time when I heard him telling me how he treats women, of course I thought this was important for the readers. Readers should know it. But I don’t condemn him, or judge him. It is a problem of cultural conflict. For him, as a male Afghan, it is quite natural to hit his wife, and say it aloud. Even if he is much more Westernized. That is the way he has grown up.

I know that among the islamophobes in Norway, among people who don’t like foreigners, who have fear of the other, of course I knew that this was very good material for them, but at the same time you cannot take that into consideration every time you write an article.” (Smilden 25.02.09)

Smilden also felt that in his interview Rais knew better what he was doing, compared to Rais’ co-operation with Seierstad:

“In my interview, there was no doubt of it being an interview. I see here a difference to what Åsne did. I didn’t feel in any way guilty, or exposing him. I’m not a supporter of hiding things, but I think people should be treated fairly. In the book, he didn’t think that every secret thing of his life would be told, and he thought his name would not be mentioned. He thought this would be quite a different book.” (Smilden 25.02.09.)

Beside this, Smilden said: “I think the article I wrote was cut down, that I wrote more. It’s always like that. Every newspaper was of course interested in the sexual sides.” (Smilden 25.02.09)

Smilden’s interview constituted again a moment at which things could have turned out very

differently. Smilden could either have refused making the interview, or he could have waited until he had received the book. Had he read the book, he could have explained the content more thoroughly to Rais. Rais could also have asked for more information, and received the book. Had he done this, he could have disagreed with the content more strongly. And had this happened, the subsequent reviews in Norway could have looked different. This could have influenced the sales, the selling of foreign rights, and for example the decisions of those juries that were to grant Seierstad different awards in the coming months. Maybe the book would never have been translated into English, or maybe Seierstad would have modified the content to meet the family's criticism.

But this did not happen. On the contrary, during its first autumn, the book did very well. The criticism was mainly positive, and Seierstad was several times on TV and in radio. In NRK's radio stations she was interviewed, or the book was discussed, in several programs,⁶⁶ and NRK aired a reading of the book (NRK radio 29.11.02–05.01.03). For NRK's TV channels, she was interviewed first time four days after the book was launched (Studio Hansen 06.09.02). This short 2-minute interview (with a 1 minute insert) discussed political situation in Afghanistan, and women's role in the country. In November, she was once again in the popular TV-show *Først og Sist* (15.11.02 this was her third time in the show), where the first comment by the host was: "You left your burqa at home." The image of burqa kept on proliferating in the epitexts. Two weeks later Seierstad was again on TV in a half an hour literature program *Bokbadet* (29.11.02). The program discussed the story behind the book, the book business in Afghanistan, and Taliban's policies. However, soon the interviewer turned her attention to the burqa. She commented that, while in Afghanistan, Seierstad had used a burqa. She asked whether all the sensuality and erotic stays inside the burqa, and finally whether the burqa is a new tradition, thus drawing once again a link between Seierstad's writing and the burqa. In the interview, Seierstad referred to Sultan as a dictator. In December, the book's success was discussed – and she was interviewed – in two different TV-programs (Store Studio 11.12.02, Redaksjon 19.12.02). In the latter program, the interviewer said that Seierstad had become a brand, and that success brings success.

This convergence of the book with TV, radio, and of course print media, works as an example of how we are not necessarily witnessing the disappearance of books because of the TV or the internet, but rather a convergence or remediation of these different forms of media and

⁶⁶ NRK radio 06.09.02, NRK radio 20.11.02, NRK radio 29.11.02, Ordfront 07.12.02, NRK radio 31.12.02.

communication. TV and books are not necessarily competing of audiences, but co-operating with each other. TV-programs concentrating on literature – like *Bokbadet* – can be conceived as abstract labels “under which more or less unique books can be rendered commensurable”, as Striphas (2009, 115) has written on a popular US TV-show *Oprah’s Book Club*. Just as with Oprah, in a smaller scale *Bokbadet* can also be understood as “a brand that fulfils an important economic and cultural function in the book industry and beyond. Branding permits publishing firms partially to sidestep the time-consuming, costly, and often haphazard work of identifying or creating a unique audience for each and every title.” (Striphas 2009, 115.) This relation between TV and books is not arbitrary in a sense that books would break the headlines only occasionally. These (TV and radio) programs or (newspaper) sections dedicated to literature exist as an infrastructure for reading and literature (Long 2003, 8–11) – no matter how well or how poorly the literary world performs. The abstract relation of convergence exists independently of individual books, but each book has to build these alliances anew in order to create or strengthen its success – and *The Bookseller of Kabul* seemed to be very good at this.

Even if media attention does not always turn into great sales, the frequency of the alliances between a book and other forms of media usually serves as a hint of a book’s commercial success. In the case of *The Bookseller of Kabul*, these two success stories went hand in hand, perhaps mutually intensifying each other’s force. Two months after its launch, the book had sold 40 000 copies in Norway (AP 19.11.02). Soon Seierstad started to receive awards. First came *The Freelancer of the Year Award* (Årets frilanser) in October (Journalisten.no 11.10.02). In November, she received *The Bookseller’s Award* (Bokhandlerprisen) from the Norwegian Association of Booksellers to speed up the Christmas sales (AP 19.11.02). A little more than a week before Christmas, the book had sold 100 000 copies (Store Studio 11.12.2002), 30 000 of which had been sold during ten days. This domestic success had its counterpart abroad: in March 2003 the foreign rights had already been sold into 12 countries (AP 04.03.03).

During these months of national success that lasted until the following August, one perspective was primarily missing: the reactions or feelings of those people who were from Afghanistan, or who had Afghan origins, did not appear on the public sphere. When I was in Oslo in February 2009, I learned that one person, Mildrid Wik, had discussed in her Master’s thesis how some people with Afghan origin (living in Norway) had experienced the book (Petersen 24.02.09). Wik (2005) had started to look for informants in February 2003: in other words, she was one of the few in Norway who was interested in Afghan perspectives before the

controversy started.⁶⁷ Wik's approach was qualitative: she had interviewed eight Afghans, and in her thesis she discussed the responses of each informant separately. According to the unpublished thesis, the informants had been "irritated", "provoked", and "sad" because of the book. Two of them said that Seierstad did not know Afghan culture well enough. One felt that the book lacked positive descriptions, and another one thought that it strengthened stereotypes and prejudices. One informant called the stories "extreme", while for another the book was "a form of espionage". One 24-year-old woman admitted that after the book had become popular in Norway, she had no longer dared to tell that she was from Afghanistan. (Wik 2005.) Wik's thesis implies that somewhere – behind or under the public celebration of the book – were critical perspectives, but these were not presented in public.⁶⁸

During these months, only very few people criticised the book publicly, or more precisely in the media. One of them was Espen Søybe, a Norwegian writer who wrote in *Dagbladet* that Seierstad's "naturalistic style threatens to make them [the persons described in the book] solely victims of their fate. It is remarkable that it has been possible to write in 2002 a book on Afghanistan which is so apolitical." (DB 02.09.02.)^{xiii} On the other hand, Søybe did not see that the book was disrespectful for the family. On the contrary he wrote that the persons are well described with respect and political correctness. However, Søybe did touch some of the sour points of the book, but finally, it was a Norway-based, Iraq-born writer, Walid al-Kubaisi, who decided to criticize the book thoroughly. He published on 26.04.2003 a critical article on the book in a small weekly newspaper *Dag og Tid*, with a circulation of little over 7000 (Dag og Tid 26.04.03). Al-Kubaisi, who is otherwise known for his critique of cultural relativism and of Muslim fundamentalism,⁶⁹ criticized Seierstad for violating journalism's ethics, the family, privacy, and truth.⁷⁰ Before anyone knew the responses of the family, he wrote that had the family known what Seierstad was up to, they would not have given their consent. According to al-Kubaisi, Seierstad had not told the family and the father "that what interested her was exposing his private life, his weaknesses, his patriarchal behaviour, and that the goal was to judge a whole culture and the religion by scandalizing their small domestic details".^{xiv}

⁶⁷ However, she interviewed her informants first in autumn 2003 and spring 2004, thus, their answers are most likely influenced by the controversy.

⁶⁸ Unfortunately, my own thesis does not make the views of different Afghan readers any more visible. That is because my focus is mainly on the most powerful readings of the book, and the readings of different Afghan individuals can by no means be called powerful.

⁶⁹ See for example his writings and interviews (AP 03.02.04, AP 03.12.03).

⁷⁰ *The Bookseller of Kabul* has been discussed from the perspective of journalistic ethics in Ida B. Tønder's (2007) unpublished Master's thesis

In his article, al-Kubaisi used a method called textual intervention, and turned the story on its head (see Pope 1994). He asked how the result would look like if an Afghan journalist came to Norway and wrote about the Norwegian family life. According to al-Kubaisi, the journalist would write about a husband running after prostitutes, a wife texting with a lover, a son taking drugs with his friends, and a daughter trying to commit suicide. Anticipating what was to happen, al-Kubaisi noted that Norwegians would have replied with an uproar. Al-Kubaisi also asked whether Norwegians would have taken the case to court and demanded compensation for libel and for exposing personal issues. The criticism was harsh, but it mainly included only those points that became commonplace half a year later, during the controversy.⁷¹

Al-Kubaisi can be defined as an actor who tried to intervene in the course of events by offering an interpretation of the book that differed radically from other public views. But he did not have alliances, which could have spread his views far: they were published in a magazine that circulated in only 7000 copies. According to al-Kubaisi himself, this was not because of his own decision. After the controversy had started, al-Kubaisi stated that he had had difficulties publishing his critical article when Seierstad was celebrated:

“When I read the book, I was really shocked. When I tried to address the moral qualms that Seierstad's book raises, I encountered a wall of reluctance to promote a viewpoint, which anticipated the [future] course of events. I felt that Seierstad was protected by a mysterious immunity that I could not understand. And I wondered why media was unwilling to raise questions about her credibility, not only regarding her book on the bookseller, but also her conflicting reports from my home country Iraq.” (AP 30.08.03.)^{xv}

This latter article was published in *Aftenposten* (AP 30.08.03). In it, al-Kubaisi criticized the media for not reacting earlier and for giving Seierstad a protected status. Whether this was the case or not, is of course subject to debate. As a matter of fact, many of my informants did not subscribe to the idea that Seierstad was protected. On the contrary, many thought she might even be more vulnerable to criticism, because of her popularity. However, all my interviews were made after a long public debate. This way the views presented by my informants might have been slightly anachronistic, reflecting first and foremost sentiments evoked by the controversy – but so were my questions, as well. One can disagree with the claim that Seierstad was protected, but at least there existed an almost unanimous consensus in 2002 that the book was worth celebration. In addition to the positive publicity and reviews Seierstad and

⁷¹ I contacted al-Kubaisi in order to interview him, but the interview never took place. For my last two emails, al-Kubaisi did not respond. The reasons might have been practical (according to his own words, he was often travelling), but they might have had something to do with my views. Al-Kubaisi (20.01.09) asked me to send him my writings before the possible interview. After receiving my text on the construction of cultural differences (inspired by Gupta & Ferguson 1992), he did not respond anymore.

the book received, also other actors contributed to her public image in the winter and spring 2003. After the awards in the autumn 2002, in May 2003 she received the *Big Journalism Award* (Den store journalistprisen), which is the highest honour a reporter in Norway can receive. As with al-Kubaisi's article, also with this award, Norwegians learned only later (BT 23.09.03) that she had been considered for the award also the previous year, but there had been strong disagreement among the jury about her methods. According to the newspaper *Bergens Tidende* (BT 23.09.03), she did not receive the award in 2002 because some jury members doubted the validity of her methods. One member of the jury, Jan Nyberg, said in *VG* (25.09.03) that according to the criticism, Seierstad "had staged [some of] her reportages and given an impression that she had been to places she had not been." But in 2003, after the success of *The Bookseller of Kabul*, Seierstad finally received the award. However, the jury disagreement that took place in 2002 became public first in the autumn of 2003, after she had been criticized on several fronts.⁷²

Even if it is difficult to draw causal links between these different events, in the spirit of ANT, it looks like successful alliances fostered other successes. Seierstad's position grew stronger after each enrolment of an ally, and these successes encouraged other actors to become allies. For example, awards followed each other. In the spring 2003, instead of criticism she received not only the *Big Journalism Award*, but also *The Peer Gynt Award* (Peer-Gynt prisen) (AP 27.05.2003), which is an annual award given by Norway's national assembly to an institution or a person "that has distinguished oneself/itself in a way that is positive and beneficial to society, and who/which has promoted Norway abroad" (Peer Gynt 2008).⁷³ *The Peer Gynt Award* marked a moment where the book was both promoted and used for the benefit of the nation and its construction.

Describing these events and alliances that followed each other does not, however, explain why it was exactly *The Bookseller of Kabul* that triggered these alliances. What was so special about it in the first place? How did my informants react to this question?

Some – although surprisingly few of my informants – gave credit to the text, or the style of the text. For example, the journalist Knut Hoem, said in my interview: "Her strategy of writing was very radical, using fiction was a radical way of telling the story. If you take it just as a

⁷² Another jury, which nominated a list of ten best Norwegian writers under the age 35, had also had a disagreement about Seierstad's nomination. Knut Hoem, who had sat in the jury, told me that several people were against Seierstad, and it was only because of his determination that she stayed on the list (Hoem 26.02.09).

⁷³ Peer Gynt is the main character in Henrik Ibsen's play of the same name.

piece of fiction, it was a very good piece of fiction, it was effective, it worked. It was a very exiting read.” (Hoem 26.02.09.) However, it is important to note that Hoem also celebrated the book as an important story in terms of its topic. In my interview, he said that the book is important above all as a story about oppressed women. (Hoem 26.02.09.) This kind of weaving between perceiving the book as a testimony of oppression and as well-written fiction reflects the wider controversy, where the genre of the book caused confusion.

But for many, the book was a success because of Seierstad’s personal qualities. Off-the-record informants told me: “This book would never have been that successful [...] if she hadn’t been the kind of person she is. She is very offensive, she is a very hard working woman, she knows what she wants, and she knows how to get success.” For another informant, she was “beautiful, very successful, and a very glamorous person”. One informant told me: “She is the most powerful writer in Norway. Of course everyone wants to be her friend.” An aura like this must help when building alliances.

Several people I interviewed, however, explained the book’s success by good timing and by its timely topic (Smilden 25.02.09, Howell 27.02.09, Raanes 16.02.09, Rustad 05.03.09). Afghanistan was the hit of that year’s autumn book sales, as Gunnar Filseth, the reviewer at *Aftenposten*, wrote: “Internet book shop Amazon offers around 40 books – fresh or new reprints – in English on this country [...]”. (AP 06.09.02a.) Some also explained the success by the fact that Seierstad wrote what the Western readers wanted to read. Smilden said:

“Of course the book came in the time when Afghanistan was at the top of agenda. She hit a very important point by presenting Muslims like she did, and it was just what the readers in the West wanted, they wanted to have it confirmed, how bad it was. It was a good timing.” (Smilden 25.02.09)

Another journalist, Tuva Raanes, said:

”I think in Norway the book was received in a way that everything the book told us was what we wanted to hear: how primitive the culture was, and how right it was for the West to go there to help the women, because they are being treated so bad, and this country really needs a push forward” (Raanes 16.02.09).

Very similarly, also an anthropologist Signe Howell said that Seierstad “says very much what most Norwegians like to hear, you know, that they [Afghans] are not very nice people, they treat their women very badly and so on” (Howell 27.02.09).

All these explanations given to my question of *why* the book became a success were subjective opinions of those people I happened to interview, and they should be read first and foremost as interpretations. These explanations, however, pave the way for my first interlude, where I will discuss further how *The Bookseller of Kabul* relates to certain political agendas and tropes.

INTERLUDE I: A METONYM CALLED THE AFGHAN WOMAN

The relations described above included different actors, such as Smilden, *Aftenposten*, or *VG*, but these actors were of course not alone in defining how Afghanistan is, or should be, conceived. By mapping the world political situation in which the book emerged, this interlude should help to navigate further between the different interpretations people made of the book and between the various explanations my informants gave for their own behaviour. Why were women, sexuality, and burqas brought up in the reception, more often than, for example, bookselling? Why was Seierstad awarded repeatedly, and why did al-Kubaisi feel he was ignored in the mainstream media?

As I explained in chapter two, ANT is cautious of referring to such concepts as social circumstances and contexts. But I also expressed my intention and wish to explore movements between local relations and more global patterns as they often appear in the form of circulating *ideas*. Even if ideas do not always form an immediate (or an easily traceable) relation within the actor-network under investigation, they can be conceived as participating in its functionings. Thus, in this interlude, I discuss spokespersons, who have touched similar issues than Seierstad and the commentators of her book. Consequently, I try to identify certain tropes and discourses, which have been used in relation to Afghanistan and discussed in scholarly literature. This should help me fill some of the gaps left empty by my human informants (either because they did not speak with me or because they did not tell everything they knew or were thinking).

As mentioned in the introduction, *The Bookseller of Kabul* was written and published in the shadows of a war, where Western military troops, including Norwegians, play an active role. Reflecting this context, anthropologist Signe Howell said in my interview that,

“the book came out in a fantastic time, in terms of being popular in the States for example. They wanted nothing more than a book like that. This was when Iraq was invaded, and the Middle East and the Muslims were the axes of evil. And you know, then you get this nice, blond, blue eyed, pretty girl, who has been there, and so daring and brave, and she has lived just like them, she can tell it as it really is. And what does she tell us? Our worst suspicions get confirmed. It’s horrible and it’s undemocratic, it’s oppressive to the women, and, all sort of things. It was a market that couldn’t wait to have a book like that. I wouldn’t be surprised if Bush sent her a telegram to thank her. Ha ha. It was just perfect, amazing at that time. And also in the UK.” (Howell 27.02.09.)

When I interviewed Howell I took the reference to the telegram only as a tasteless joke – and so did Howell. However, later, when following the trial in the Oslo District Court, I learned

that, indeed, Seierstad had received thank you letters from Laura Bush and Tony Blair (ref. Seierstad's testimony on 15.6.2010 in Oslo District Court). This showed, according to the author, that there existed very wide general interest for the book.⁷⁴ Accordingly, let's start the exploration of this discourse, where *The Bookseller of Kabul* meets the Western political leaders, by a reference to Laura Bush, the wife of George W. Bush (the US president between 2000–2008). Laura Bush started to campaign on women's rights just little after the US troops had entered Afghanistan in the autumn 2001. She spoke about the issue in the president's weekly radio address on 17.11.2001, where she was the first wife of a US president to speak. She started her address by saying:

“I'm Laura Bush and I'm delivering this week's radio address to kick off a worldwide effort to focus on the brutality against women and children by the al Qaeda terrorist network and the regime it supports in Afghanistan, the Taliban. --- Afghan women know through hard experience what the rest of the world is discovering, the brutal oppression of women is a central goal of the terrorists.” (CNN 2001.)

She finished with an appeal to join an enterprise in support of the Afghan women: “I hope Americans will join our family in working to ensure that dignity and opportunity will be secured for all the women and children of Afghanistan.” (CNN 2001.) The next week, both US Vice President, Dick Cheney, and Secretary of Defence, Donald Rumsfeld, spoke on behalf of Afghan women. Secretary of State Colin Powell told in a press briefing that “the recovery of Afghanistan must entail a restoration of the rights of Afghan women” . (Cit. in McMorris 2002.)

These appeals can be read in the context of a long chain of spokespersons concentrating on the question of Muslim women, even so much so that we can talk of a trope. This chain can best be described by returning to those parts of the postcolonial theory, which discuss the intersection between sex, feminism, and Orientalism. Already Said's *Orientalism* included discussion on sex as one central area of orientalist descriptions, and for example Frantz Fanon (see e.g. 1967) wrote extensively on sex and colonial power. Rather than diminishing, this side of postcolonial theory has flourished in the last few decades. For example, Meyda Yegenoglu (1998) has argued that cultural and sexual difference are constitutive of each other. According to her, “the discursive constitution of Otherness is achieved simultaneously through sexual as well as cultural modes of differentiation” (Yegenoglu 1998, 2). Yegenoglu's approach is psychoanalytical, she emphasises the latent, unconscious side of Orientalism, and stresses “the ways in which representations of the Orient are interwoven by sexual imageries, unconscious fantasies, desires, fears, and dreams” (Yegenoglu 1998, 26). In the case of Muslim countries,

⁷⁴ The court case will be discussed later in this chapter and in appendix 2.

this has quite univocally meant that representations of women and their bodies have become to play a central role in the discourses of domination. Yegenoglu (1998, 98–99) describes a metonymic association between the Orient and its women, between tradition and women, according to which “the most essential features of the culture are assumed to be inscribed onto her [the Muslim woman]; she is taken as the concrete embodiment of oppressive Islamic tradition”.

This statement can be grounded on long series of historical observations, which Said (1979) and Yegenoglu (1998) among others have described (see also e.g. Ahmed 1992, Fanon 1970). But equally well, we can find significant examples of it in the 21st century and in the context of the war in Afghanistan, as was shown in the example of Laura Bush. According to Lila Abu-Lughod (2003), the era after 9/11 is marked by a heightened interest in Muslim women’s body and hence, the marines landing in Afghanistan can be considered in the press as a feminist event. Similarly, for Sherene H. Razack (2004, 130), in the invasion of Afghanistan “the Taliban’s treatment of Afghan women far overshadowed the historical context in which they gained power, a context in which the United States played an active role while securing its own economic interests in oil.”⁷⁵ *The Bookseller of Kabul* itself can be read as participating in this kind of process: it discusses more the women’s situation than it does the geopolitical role of Afghanistan and its historical wavering between rather secular and more fundamentalist forms of Islam. It was produced in the aftermath of those aforementioned comments which linked women’s liberation to the legitimation of the war. Seierstad was in Afghanistan when Bush, Cheney and Rumsfeld called for a campaign to support women’s rights, and less than two months later she told in public that she would write a book about an Afghan family (VG 02.12.01, DB 08.01.02). Also the early media reception in Norway, described above, stressed the book’s strong link to women’s cause. Newspapers named women’s rights as its main theme, and for example TV interviewers asked Seierstad mainly about women’s situation.

Judith Butler argues forcefully in her *Frames of War* (2009) for a need to rearticulate the relationship between certain liberal claims for freedom, or certain conceptualisation of freedom, and anti-Muslim sentiments. She writes about the need to understand how especially women’s sexual freedom and freedom of expression have been “invoked instrumentally to wage a cultural assault on Islam that reaffirms US sovereignty and violence” (Butler 2009, 105). She writes about “the frames of war”, which for her are “the ways of selectively carving up experience as essential to the conduct of war” (Butler 2009, 26). Butler plays with the

⁷⁵ When saying this, Razack does not mean to downplay the violence encountered by women, as her main preoccupation lies exactly in how to act against sexed violence.

several connotations of the words 'frame' or 'to frame', referring both to the picture frames and to framing as false accusation. She reminds that pictures are framed, but so too are criminals or innocent persons. Framing implicitly guides interpretation and what we see, think, and recognize. (Butler 2009, 8.) Resonating with her theories of performativity, Butler's claim is that the frames need to be reproduced constantly. "The frame that seeks to contain, convey, and determine what is seen --- depends upon the conditions of reproducibility in order to succeed", writes Butler (2009, 10). Among other things, she is interested in "the framing of sexual and feminist politics in the service of the war effort" (Butler 2009, 26). According to her, "[s]exually progressive conceptions of feminist rights or sexual freedoms have been mobilized not only to rationalize wars against predominantly Muslim populations, but also to argue for limits to immigration to Europe from predominantly Muslim countries." (Butler 2009, 26.) Butler pays much attention on frames as "cultural modes of regulating affective and ethical dispositions through a selective and differential framing of violence" (Butler 2009, 1). These frames make certain lives, like those of Muslim men, less grievable than others. They need to be constantly reproduced in order to be effective. Frames "can only circulate by virtue of their reproducibility", writes Butler (2009, 24), echoing my discussion on tropes. These frames found one of their most visible and debated expressions in the Western media in autumn 2010, when I was already writing my thesis. On 9th of August 2010, *Time*-magazine portrayed on its front cover an Afghan woman with a mutilated nose, while the headline asked: "What Happens if We Leave Afghanistan?", thus drawing direct links between the fate of Afghanistan, its women and the presence of the Western troops (figure 3).⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Later, in February 2011, the photograph won the World Press Photo of the Year 2010 award (World Press Photo 2011).



Figure 3. The front cover of *Time*-magazine on 9th of August 2010.

Similarly to Butler, according to Razack (2004, 129–130), the policing of Muslim communities in the name of gender equality has become a globally organised phenomenon especially after 9/11. She suggests that the body of the Muslim woman is used to justify the violence against Muslim men. Razack's (2004) influential article on the attitudes towards Muslims in Norway argues that Norway has not been an exception, more to the contrary. Razack (2004) claims that intellectually many Norwegian scholars and public debaters have followed the international tendencies explicated by Samuel Huntington's (1993, 2002) clash of civilizations thesis. Razack calls this a culturalist or culturalising approach against Muslims, according to which, for example, violence is understood as originating entirely in culture. In Razack's opinion, this approach obscures the multiple factors that give rise to and sustain violence. According to her, the Norwegian culturalist approach is constructed around three archetypes: the civilised European, the imperilled Muslim woman, and the dangerous Muslim man. It tends to explain for example domestic violence against Muslim women with cultural explanations. She calls this veiled racism, and even more importantly, she reminds that the naming of violence against Muslim women is used as a weapon in the war on terror. In her article, Razack analyses for example the writings of a well known anthropologist Unni Wikan, who was also active in the debates around *The Bookseller of Kabul*. (Razack 2004.)

As mentioned, the most well know supporter of the argument, according to which culture should be used as the all-explaining category, is Samuel Huntington. Even if one had not read

Huntington's controversial article (1993) or book (2002) about the clash of civilizations, the idea of civilizations that are or are about to be in conflict with each others is part of our everyday political imaginary. And as the theory says, it is the West and the Islam that are most likely to be the main adversaries. At the core of Huntington's argument is the idea of our era being an era of different civilizations. According to Huntington (1993, 25), "differences among civilizations are not only real; they are basic". This means that "societies sharing cultural affinities cooperate with each other", and consequently, "[t]he West's universalist pretensions increasingly bring it into conflict with other civilizations, most seriously with Islam and China" (Huntington 2002, 20). For Huntington (1993, 48–49), it is thus "clearly in the interest of the West --- to limit the expansion of the military strength of Confucian and Islamic states --- [and] to strengthen international institutions that reflect and legitimate Western interests".⁷⁷

As mentioned above, Razack (2004) has linked this thesis to Norway's intellectual atmosphere, and to the special interest paid to Muslim women and her body. Consequently, the concentration on the female body, and its uses in ways that make it hyper-visible, brings also the practice of veiling to the forefront when women's rights are discussed. According to Yegenoglu (2004, 129-130), a "metonymic association between tradition and woman" explains "the continual obsession and the fundamental weight given to women's unveiling as the privileged sign of progress". Taken as the most visible marker of tradition and religion, "the veil provided the benevolent Western woman with what she had desired: a clinching example that interlocks 'woman' and 'tradition/Islam' so that it could be morally condemned in the name of emancipation" (Yegenoglu 1998, 99). Leila Ahmed (1992) has made similar observations when discussing the discourse of the veil as a tool in colonial domination. She writes that during the Victorian times, Islam was described as being "innately and immutably oppressive to women", and it was thought "that the veil and segregation epitomized that oppression, and that these customs were the fundamental reasons for the general and comprehensive backwardness of Islamic societies" (Ahmed 1992). As a consequence:

"Veiling – to *Western* eyes, the most visible marker of the differentness and inferiority of Islamic societies – became the symbol now of both the oppression of women (or, in the language of the day, Islam's degradation of women) and the backwardness of Islam, and it became the open target of colonial attack and the spearhead of the assault on Muslim societies" (Ahmed 1992).

⁷⁷ Huntington's perspective carries with it several problems. As Amartya Sen, among others, has stressed, people can be classified according to multiple systems of partitioning (classes, occupations, languages, politics etc.). Using the category of civilization to explain identities reduces different human relations to this one singular classification. (Sen 2006, 10–11, 40–46.)

Previously, critics, for example Fanon (1970), had written on the issue of veiling in Algeria as a sore point for the colonial France. He wrote on the political doctrine of the French colonial rule in Algeria:

“If we want to destroy the structure of Algerian society, its capacity for resistance, we must first of all conquer women: we must go and find them behind the veil where they hide themselves and in the houses where men keep them out of sight.” (Fanon in Yegenoglu 1998, 40.)

In *The Bookseller of Kabul*, one whole chapter (“Billowing, Fluttering, Winding”) is dedicated to the discussion on burqa, and as was shown above, the early Norwegian reception of the book gave much attention to it. It seemed to be the one thing in the book, which interested the media most.

A further example of a popular and well-known spokesperson for unveiling was Cherie Blair, the wife of Tony Blair (the UK Prime Minister between 1997–2007). She campaigned against the veil worn by Muslims throughout the naughties. In 2001, she hosted a Monday briefing at Downing Street on women’s rights in Afghanistan, where she demonstrated the burqa by posing for the cameras with her fingers around her eyes (Bbc.co.uk 19.11.01, figure 4). The title of the article was, “Cherie 'lifts veil' for Afghan women”, thus making references to unveiling as a political project.



Figure 4. The illustration used by BBC News Online for the article on 19.11.01 discussing Cherie Blair’s Monday Briefing.

In 2007, she said: “if you get to the stage where a woman is not able to express her personality because we cannot see her face, then we do have to ask whether this is something that is actually acknowledging the woman’s right to be a person.” (Times Online 31.11.07.) Blair’s

campaign started in 2001, only little after Laura Bush had spoken in the radio, recalling Razack's (2004) idea that we are dealing with a globally organized phenomenon.

In her influential article "Under Western Eyes. Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses" Chandra Talpade Mohanty asserted (1986, 352-353), that the veiled woman has become a universal, ahistorical image setting "in motion a colonialist discourse, which exercises a very specific power in defining, coding and maintaining existing first/third world connections". Mohanty (1986, 347) identified a Western feminist universalist tendency for an "analytic leap from the practice of veiling to an assertion of its general significance in controlling women", ignoring the cultural specificities of this practice.

This view of the veil or burqa being a universal image of oppression has been present also in the Norwegian debates on the veil. When I was in Norway, in February 2009, a group of Norwegian public figures published an open letter against allowing veils to be used in public positions in Norway.⁷⁸ According to the letter:

"We are lucky in Norway. We live in one of the world's most equal countries. Women and men's absolute equality has been crucial for freedom and for the high degree of prosperity we have enjoyed for generations. --- It is therefore very regrettable and incomprehensible that under the principle of equality the government would allow the hijab as part of police uniforms. Let's be clear: Hijab is not value-neutral. Hijab marks the woman in the public arena as inferior to the man." (Human Rights Service 2009.)^{xvi}

Similar discussions have been heard in many Western countries, of which France is the most famous example (see e.g. Winter 2006, Najmabadi 2006).

In Yegenoglu's (1998) analysis, the obsession with unveiling finds explanation both in psychoanalytical literature and in Foucauldian analysis of modern disciplinary power. According to Yegenoglu, the Western emphasis on the practice of veiling manifests an unconscious desire to gaze: "The veil is one of those tropes through which western fantasies of penetration into the mysteries of the Orient and access to the interiority of the Other are fantasmatically achieved." (Yegenoglu 1998, 39.)⁷⁹ However, according to Yegenoglu (1998), this gaze is also linked to the Enlightenment ideals on visibility as the base for knowledge, and to the Foucauldian analysis of knowledge as the base for control and domination. Following Foucault, Yegenoglu (1998, 108) writes on the Enlightenment ideals, which favour

⁷⁸ For example, two Norwegian authors, Unni Lindell and Anne B. Ragde, who both supported *The Bookseller of Kabul* in public signed the letter.

⁷⁹ For a closer reading of veil as a fetish, see Yegenoglu's (1998) reading of Bhabha.

transparency, visibility, and seeing: “Modern disciplinary power wove together knowledge, vision/seeing, and the techniques of rational control and productive domination.” According to her, the Western culture and its epistemology after Enlightenment have been characterized and dominated by a scopic tradition. Consequently, Yegenoglu identifies veiling and unveiling as key features of the colonial domination. “Modern disciplinary power is concerned with actively shaping individual minds and bodies based on the knowledge acquired by rendering them perfectly visible.” (Yegenoglu 1998, 108.) This requires unveiling the Muslim women, which has become a central theme in Western feminist struggles over the liberation of Muslim women.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Visibility, transparency and unveiling are central themes also in *The Bookseller of Kabul*. The whole book can be named as a project that made the family, and their private life visible for the Western audience. This visibility is also literal: a chapter called “The Smell of Dust” describes naked women bodies in hammam. Thus, the book fits well into the frameworks of visibility or the desiring gaze.

3.3 THE BOOK BECOMES A CONTROVERSY

After the interlude, it is time to get back to the micro-level where *The Bookseller of Kabul* continued its career. Without a question, the first year after the launch of *The Bookseller of Kabul* can be summarised as a success – both for Seierstad and for the book. As shown above, the book received positive attention in the biggest Norwegian newspapers immediately after its release. It was discussed on radio- and TV-shows, and the whole book was read in the radio. Seierstad received several awards, and the sales for the book in Norway were extraordinary. It was also doing good internationally. By June 2003, beside Norway, it had been published already in Sweden, Denmark, Latvia, Iceland, Germany, Italy, and France, and in March 2003, the rights had been sold to twelve countries.⁸¹ Seierstad also received a journalism award in Italy in June 2003 (Ilaria Alpi Journalistic Award) (NRK.no 16.06.03).

But even an actor-network, that looks as durable and powerful as this, can transform radically. As noted already, had some actors acted differently, the events could have taken a different turn. At least anachronistically observed, for example the aforementioned correspondent Smilden, the referee, or the Iranian born intellectual al-Kubaisi might have influenced the publication process and the reception more than they did. Or people who did not intervene publicly could have done so. Certain voices could have broken the consensus around the book, but this did not happen...not until the autumn 2003 when those actors that had been previously mostly excluded from the events started to transform the relations. Seierstad had numerous strong allies, but there was one unstable and unreliable relation in the network.

The actor who triggered these changes most visibly was another Norwegian female journalist, Tuva Raanes. In summer 2003, she was working for a women's magazine *KK* and going to Afghanistan. In my interview, she described the events the following way:

“We went to Afghanistan mainly to follow the women's situation after the fall of Taliban. And I was supposed to do a normal travel report, and I was thinking who would know a lot about the city. I knew that the bookseller had collected photos and kept them during Taliban as well, so I thought I might as well go and talk to him. And ask about the book as well, of course, but that was supposed to be a side story. (Raanes 16.02.09)

Raanes' original motivation for the trip seemed to follow the discourse described in the interlude I: she wanted to write an article on women's situation in Afghanistan. Because of this motivation she went to Rais' shop. The bookseller's reputation, in other words, the alliances he

⁸¹ The publication dates have been collected from publisher's webpages and from a document received from Seierstad's literary agent (Høier 28.01.10).

had built during the decades he had sold books to Westerners, led one more Western journalist to his bookshop. In the bookshop, things changed. According to Raanes:

“We went to the bookseller, and I asked him, how did you like the book [*The Bookseller of Kabul*], and would you like to write a review for us. He said he hadn’t read the book: ‘I don’t know anything about the book, I just know that it’s a book about Afghan culture.’ He asked me to tell him something about the book. And I didn’t know what to say. Afghan culture? My god! I said that I’d try to get a copy of the English version.” (Raanes 16.02.09.)

At this point Raanes started to use her alliances and tried to build new ones:

“I spoke to some of the correspondents working for English newspapers and living in Kabul at the time, because I knew that they got copies of the book. I knew that there were several copies of the manuscript circulating in Kabul. But they said: ‘No, we don’t want to give you the copies, because we don’t want to make trouble for Åsne.’ They of course knew her, because she had covered the war. That’s when we really decided we had to get the bookseller the book. I tried to get the publisher to send me the book to Kabul, which was not possible. So I went back to Norway, and got the book from England to Norway, and shipped it over through a speed delivery service.” (Raanes 16.02.09.)

The English translation of the manuscript had been pre-circulating in the hands of journalists, but no one had given it to the family to read. According to Raanes, it was the case because of their solidarity to Seierstad.⁸² But Smilden gave a more cynical guess: maybe they just wanted to have the story themselves (Smilden 25.02.09). Noteworthy is also the English publisher’s reluctance to send the book to Kabul, to others than journalists. As Raanes said: “Honestly, if you are sending copies to journalists in Kabul, why are you not sending it to the family. For me the question was, were they trying to hide something.” (Raanes 16.02.09.) Maybe it was so. A British journalist, Christina Lamb, later wrote that she had met Seierstad at a literary festival where Seierstad had asked her “clearly worried”: “Do you have any idea how he [Shah Muhammed Rais] would take the book?” (Sunday Times 10.10.04). These pieces of information suggest that Seierstad and her publisher were anticipating a scandal, but this did not prevent them from publishing the book. Nevertheless, whatever the reasons were, as a consequence no one had given Rais the book, even if according to Raanes, he had asked some correspondents to get hold of it. Rais was not able to enrol others, or maybe he was not trying hard enough, as he was not expecting anything outrageous. Some journalists might have been indifferent and some probably thought he knew about the content already. Nothing in the object revealed that the content had been kept secret from the family: on the contrary, it was easy to assume that the family was aware of it. That had at least been Raanes’ own impression when she first read the book: Rais must have known about the content (Raanes 16.02.09).

⁸² Later I sent Raanes an email asking her to name these journalists, but she did not respond.

Some of my informants assumed even six years after the controversy broke out that the family had seen the manuscript before the publication. Readers did not expect or assume that the book had been kept secret from the family. And Seierstad had at least not tried to change this impression. In December 2002, when she was interviewed on TV, the interviewer asked Seierstad whether the family had read the book (Store Studio 11.12.02). Seierstad answered that, yes, she had given the book to the family. It was only later that people learned this was a lie – but nobody seemed to remember this statement at that point. The statement did not proliferate as extensively as many other comments, and neither did journalists return to it. Some journalists also took for granted that the family was not recognizable. As the senior editor at *Aftenposten*'s culture section, Per Anders Madsen, said in my interview: “We didn't think it through back then. We just took it for granted that this family was anonymized and that everything was ok. We can blame ourselves for this. It would have been possible to focus on these very doubtful aspects of the novel from the beginning.” (Madsen 02.03.09.) Very few, however, thought it through in public.⁸³ Consequently, the family did not know they could need or get allies, and not many people thought they needed or deserved them.

Raanes became a key actor, but in her own view, an actor who just played the role someone would have played anyway. Her views echoed those of Smilden. Without me even mentioning the word actor, Raanes said: “I did a job, and it was just a journalistic piece of work I did. After that I felt that I'm not an actor in this play or in this whole thing that is happening afterwards.” She continued: “Of course a journalist will always be a kind of actor, because we ask people questions, we make things happen, but I'm finished with it.” She has not been intervening in the case ever since, “also because you tempt to get stuck in a kind of label, that you are the journalist who tried to destroy Åsne Seierstad”. (Raanes 16.02.09.) Seierstad's alliances influenced even those who felt they had reasons to criticize her: being labelled as the one who is against Seierstad did not look good. But neither did Raanes ever consider not publishing the story because of Seierstad or the privacy of the family: “It was obvious that they [the family] would get it [the book] one way or another. It was just a question of time. We were lucky to be there at that time, but he [Shah Muhammed Rais] would have got it anyway, he is a very intelligent person. He reads and sells international newspapers.” (Raanes

⁸³ *VG*'s review had touched upon the issue of anonymisation, when the reviewer gave Seierstad credit for anonymising the family but also wrote that Seierstad must have thought through how the family feels when they read an English version of the book. This small hesitation, however, was published more than three months after the book was launched in Norway and only on *VG*'s web version. (*VG* 27.12.02.)

16.02.09.) Here we can recall Smilden, according to whom, Rais “was known by so many people. It couldn’t have been kept a secret. It was impossible.” (Smilden 25.02.09.)

Noticing it or not, the Norwegian journalists modified the case. The anger of Rais became public on 28th of August 2003, but before that something happened which was never told in the media – even if it was not a secret. Here is part of a report Raanes wrote explaining what happened in the weeks after Rais received the book. Raanes wrote the report in 2004 for the jury of a journalism award, Skup:

“Since I was not present when the bookseller read the book, we had contact by phone and e-mail. Two days after the bookseller had got the book, I called Shah Mohammad Rais. I wanted to know what he thought about the book. “I’m shocked”, he said and expressed great disappointment because of what he had read. Because of a fear that misunderstandings would occur, --- after finishing the phone call, we agreed to do everything via e-mail. ---

I chose to use the same method when I collected comments from Seierstad: first a phone call, and then e-mail. Seierstad chose not to answer my questions, but she wrote a statement she e-mailed me several days after she had received the questions.

[...] it turned out to be far more difficult to get concrete answers from the source who was in Norway, Seierstad, than the source who was in Kabul, Shah Mohammad.

When I got the email from Seierstad, and it became clear that she did not want to respond specifically to the questions I had sent her, I repeated the questions, but again without getting specific answers.”^{xvii} (Raanes 2003.)

Then something happened:

“The source got cold feet.

Shah Mohammad Rais and Seierstad were in contact during ‘the bookseller case’. I forwarded telephone numbers to both parties, because they both wanted to get in touch with each other.

The day before the article was originally supposed to go to press and everything seemed to be in order, I received a new message from Kabul. Shah Mohammad had spoken with the author Åsne Seierstad. In fear of hurting the author and creating problems for her, the bookseller no longer wanted us to publish the article. He withdrew the whole interview.

The source, who had just few days earlier used very strong words, no longer wished to defend his honour – as he had expressed his desire earlier. He still believed that Seierstad had violated ethical guidelines by taking advantage of his hospitality, the way he felt she did. He expressed his fear of how the book would influence the Western readers’ perception of Afghanistan and Afghan culture. He also expressed his concern for the consequences this book would have for the women discussed in it. After having communicated with Shah Mohammad Rais again, and after sending him the article in English, however, the source approved the content, and the article went to press.”^{xviii} (Raanes 2003.)

The events Raanes describes form a process of enrolments. Raanes wanted to enrol Rais, and translate her interest into the language of his interests, and so did Seierstad. For a moment Rais hesitated, but in the end he decided to give his permission to publish the interview. Whether I can trust Raanes' description of the story, or know whether Rais and Seierstad made some secret contract, remains unsolved.

Once again, things could have gone differently, if Seierstad had managed to enrol Rais and avoided the printing of the article. If Rais had not publicly expressed his dissatisfaction with the book, most of the criticism Seierstad has received might not have occurred. Or Rais and Seierstad might have come to an agreement, and the court case would never have started.

But this did not happen, and consequently, on 28th of August 2003, the conflict was finally made public in Norway's biggest newspaper *VG*, with a title on the front cover saying: "The Bookseller of Kabul feels betrayed by Åsne Seierstad."^{84xx} (VG 28.08.03.) Raanes originally wrote her story to the women's magazine, but before it was published, the article was reported in *VG* (VG 28.08.03a, VG 28.08.03b).

According to Raanes this happened because,

"KK has a long publishing schedule. I was sitting on the story for weeks, I think. But then we just realized that it was a very good story to sell out to the press – that we were the first, and all that. And we sold, or we gave it to VG, and they printed the first article about the article in KK. [We chose to give it to VG because] VG and KK have some sort of an agreement, these decisions are made on higher level, so it was not me really, who decided. It was something the editor decided, and for me of course it didn't matter." (Raanes 16.02.09.)

In the *VG*'s (28.8.2003a) article, Rais said he hates Seierstad for abusing his hospitality and friendliness. He was also surprised that Seierstad did not think of the possible consequences the book might have for the family. He said that especially stories on his sisters' lover and a story about a murder could harm the family, because not everyone knew of these secrets before the book came out. *VG* dedicated almost three pages to the matter. In the article Rais said:

"I welcomed her [Seierstad] according to polite Afghan norms – without demanding anything from her. She was a woman and a guest! All members of the family welcomed her and respected her for five months. --- She was a VIP-guest in all family occasions in our home, and in the homes of our relatives. We let her dig deep into our family matters. I never hid anything from her." (VG 28.8.2003a.)^{84xx}

⁸⁴ According to most other sources, Seierstad stayed there only for 3–4 months.

According to him, it was Seierstad who hid something:

“I asked whether she could translate the book for me, but she hid it and did not translate even a paragraph. The book is based on some few events, and it is a very bad and an untrue story. She says she has anonymised me, but nothing has been changed: my work address, my city of birth, and many other things.” (Ibid.)^{xxi}

Seierstad, in return, put the biggest blame on her English publisher. In the article, she stressed that she was in Iraq at the time the English translation was ready and could not check it. Moreover, she said:

“The problem was that I did not get the right [to show the translation to the family] from my English publisher. I see, I should have said I demand that. I’m very sorry now that I did not do more. They said they do not want to have any changes. I’m very angry with myself that I did not demand that back then.” (VG 28.08.03b.)^{xxii}

She claimed that after returning from her trip to Iraq, she tried to deal with the issue, but the English publisher did not want any uproar around the book. From the perspective of responsibility, this comment is crucial: Seierstad suggested that it is not only the author’s responsibility but also – or maybe even mainly – the publisher’s, if the family feels betrayed or in danger. Moreover, the comment implies that the act of publishing had been legitimate and unproblematic, as long as the book had not come out in English. Seierstad also insisted that everything was true, and if Rais said the book includes lies, it is because she advised him to do so. According to her, she had suggested that Rais “can tell people that it is not about him, that there are things I have invented”. In the end of the article, she stressed that it is a “women’s book” and she has received lots of roses from Afghan women. About the bookseller she said: “One can ask, what kind of a book this man would have been happy with. It would have been a polished picture. He was rather dreaming that it would be a biography of a hero.” (VG 28.08.03b.)^{xxiii}

These three pages in *VG* opened the floor for the controversy. These pages drew a picture of a man who felt betrayed and of an author who almost admitted things could have been done differently. Already in these articles, the court case hung in the air, as Rais said in the interview: “I will sue her and all her publishers for libel and for spreading rumours.” (VG 28.08.03a.)^{xxiv}

The timing of these articles was well managed. For Seierstad, the ability to postpone the moment when the conflict became public might have had some significance. What easily passes the eye is that the previous day, the same paper had published a one-page article on Seierstad’s next book on Iraq (VG 27.08.03). The journalist, Lena Storvand, who had written the article, was part of the team that wrote also the articles on the controversy, published the very next day (VG 27.08.03, VG 28.08.03a, VG 28.08.03b). Storvand must have known about

the coming scandal. Still – or because of that – she published another article promoting Seierstad’s next book just a day before the public controversy started. I contacted Storvand before my third trip to Oslo about a possible interview, and she agreed to give it.⁸⁵ When in Oslo, I tried to contact her two times by email and by phone, but she did not get back to me. In addition to *VG*, *Aftenposten* also published an interview with Seierstad, and her new book, just a day before the controversy became public (AP 27.08.03). At least for an outside observer, at this point, the alliances between Seierstad, some journalists and these newspapers seemed strong, and the interests between the actors somehow shared. The coming controversy did not prevent Storvand from writing, and *VG* from publishing, a text on Seierstad’s next book – even if her former book was about to be called into question. The prospect of a scandal over her representations of other people did not harm her credibility – as a correspondent or as travel writer on Iraq – enough for the journalists, and the papers, to withdraw the articles.

But even more importantly, the postponed eruption of the controversy can be linked to the international career of the book. The book was launched in the UK on the 7th of August 2003, just three weeks before the scandal started in Norway. As Raanes had sat on her scandalous article for a long time already and had contacted the author and the publisher, Seierstad and the UK publisher (Little Brown) most likely knew about the approaching controversy when they launched the book. This gave them a possibility to plan the launch so that the book itself could be protected from criticism.⁸⁶

The wake of the controversy naturally raised one question above others: could Seierstad be held responsible for the reactions of the family, or for the possibly dangerous consequences of the book? What if the book has really put the family in danger? Is Seierstad responsible for that? Or is the responsibility collective? My informants reacted to this question differently. Others wanted to make Seierstad responsible. Unni Rustad (05.03.09), a woman who had worked in Afghanistan, told me: “I don’t think she intended it to be used this way [as a tool against Muslims in Norway], but I think she didn’t show the responsibility to think these things through, what fate this book would have.” In other words, Seierstad should have given more attention to the structures of the publishing and media industries. Another informant, from the Afghanistan Committee (which received donations from Seierstad and worked on Afghan issues in Norway), thought Seierstad had received criticism she did not deserve, but

⁸⁵ We exchanged emails on 31.05.10.

⁸⁶ I have not been able to check this, because Raanes has not confirmed the exact chronology of the events.

nonetheless the informant stressed that: "Seierstad chose to sell it as an English translation."
(Petersen 24.02.09)

In Raanes' opinion, the logic – or the codes – of the profession should have influenced Seierstad:

"I think you can make people responsible for these kind of things. First of all the author has a huge responsibility for making her sources aware what they are being part of, what kind of story they are being part of, what kind of angle you have. For me that is a basic thing in journalism. She is a journalist, she knows that. And secondly, I think the publisher has a huge responsibility: why didn't they question her about what the bookseller is saying about this, should we check it, is there something we could do to the book? They must have depicted this, in some way or another." (Raanes 16.02.09.)

Several people told me the same thing. As a journalist, Seierstad must have known that in the 21st century someone would go to look for the family. "My personal opinion is that Åsne Seierstad must have known what she was doing, that she was overstepping, she is an intelligent woman", said the film director Odd Syse (Syse 20.02.09) who was supposed to film a documentary on the family. "If she really didn't understand that they would read the book, then she is too ignorant to write it, or then she has a very strange view of the other – like that they are very primitive, who cannot read or write. Listen, he is a bookseller for god's sake", said Unni Rustad (Rustad 05.03.09). These kind of comments suggest that if it was so obvious for all others that the family was to be exposed, also Seierstad should have thought about it, and acted accordingly. As the lecturer in journalism at BI Norwegian School of Management, Jo Bech-Karlsen, said in my interview, "I don't think it [reportage journalism] would evoke strong reactions, if you are open and let people participate in the process – so it would not be a shock when it comes out". He thought that a reporter should prepare the people s/he is writing about for encountering "how it feels to get into the public sphere. That it may evoke lots of feelings they didn't expect. But if they are well prepared, and if you talk about it with them beforehand, it should be ok." Bech-Karlsen concluded by saying that "in this kind of journalism I think the main responsibility lies on the reporter [not for example on the publisher]". (Bech-Karlsen 19.02.09.)

However, some saw that Seierstad had only a limited responsibility, as did the journalist Knut Hoem, who said in my interview:

"Did she take advantage of the hospitality of the bookseller? Yes, she did. Did she know the consequences of her exploiting the family. No, probably not to total extent. She had probably old-fashioned ideas that she would get away with it, that the world is not globalized. As a journalist I know that you have a loyalty to your story, you want the story to be told, and you know that sometimes you need to be like a bulldozer, getting through, taking advantage, getting into the situation, telling the story." (Hoem 26.02.09.)

Hoem's comment echoes a view that it was not actually Seierstad, but some essence of her profession, which made the book emerge. The structural reasons for her actions, the fact that the industry or the system works in spite of individuals, can be used in defence of Seierstad, as Raanes told me:

"I think lots of Norwegian journalists would have written the same book. It has nothing to do with Åsne being morally weaker. This is just a problem we have: not being aware of the people we write about. I'm not sure how I would have written the book myself..." (Raanes 16.02.09.)

INTERLUDE II. INTENTIONS, LOGICS, AND RESPONSIBILITIES.

Above, I have discussed how some actors – like Raanes – understood and acted out their roles. The chapter also touched upon the issue of responsibility over the book and over exposing the family. If we believe that actors know what they do and why they do it, as ANT teaches us, it is best to pause here for a moment to elaborate on the relationship between certain dynamics, individual actors and their responsibilities.

Many of my informants explained their own motivations, and the behaviour of others, by referring to the logics of publishing or journalism. Apparently, the forms of action around *The Bookseller of Kabul* were partly informed by some a priori assumptions on how journalism or publishing works. My informants often referred to existing structures, which made them act in a certain way. For example, Raanes explained the choice of the publishing platform for her article by referring to decisions made on “higher level” (Raanes 16.02.09). Raanes was a journalist working for a magazine named *KK*. The magazine is published by Aller Media, which is owned by Carl Allers Etablissement AS, based in Copenhagen, Denmark. According to its web pages, in April 2010, *KK* had estimatedly 400 000 readers a week (KK 2010). An actor like Raanes is thus defined, among other things, by her professional status, by the expectations of her employer and the 400 000 readers, as well as by the interests of the owner of the media house. Furthermore, her acts are influenced by her own reading habits and by her experience in publishing and journalism, as well as by her possible education. Even if all this could, in principle, be analysed by describing all these actors, and their converging or conflicting motivations, no thesis could cope with such number of actors and influences. Thus, we encounter a moment when we need to use such words as the logics or dynamics of the publishing world, or journalism. Furthermore, this is also how actors like Raanes and Smilden themselves explained their behaviour: they played according to the rules of the game.

From the perspective of my methods, this is crucial: how much are the actions of different actors inscribed into the dynamics of the network? At least according to some actors, they were only carrying forward an act someone would have done anyway. Smilden thought he did not need to consider whether to reveal Rais’ identity, because in the end someone would have done it. He said he wrote the article, because it was a good story. Smilden knew what he had done and why he had done it, but the rationales for his behaviour were found in his profession, or in the assumption that Rais’ anonymity would have been cracked anyway. Here we find a mechanism at play, one which appears as coherent and rational, but one for which it is no longer possible to identify a person who conceived it (Foucault 1980, 203). This reminds Foucault’s descriptions of power. For him power is both intentional and nonsubjective: “there is no power that is exercised without a series of aims and objectives. But this does not mean that it results from the choice or decision of an individual subject.” (Foucault 1990, 95.) The

logic is clear, but there is no one who had invented it and only few have formulated it (ibid. 95). The logic of the system is irreducible to the explicit intentions of any one actor, but yet it does not mean there would not be an orientation toward a matrix of ends and purposes (Dean 1999, 22).⁸⁷ Even if, in the spirit of ANT, we would concentrate on actors and their testimonies, there are certain contingent orientations towards shared goals, like selling magazines and books, or enacting according to professional ideals. Consequently, the ability or the will of the actors to articulate what lies behind their decision has to be critically examined – as I already discussed in the section on my methods. This is needed especially when the actors give their interpretations of other people’s dubious motives against their own. This entered my mind when the cultural journalist Hoem said:

“But I also recognize that there has been a kind of Hollywood type development about the suffering children in Afghanistan. There is an industry out there that is taking the Western angle, telling the story of women being oppressed. There are lots of books and films, which exploit the interest in the Asian culture – I’m thinking of films like *Not without my daughter*, a poor mother looking for her child somewhere, wherever it was.” (Hoem 26.02.09.)⁸⁸

This industry is part and parcel of the events I am analyzing, but it is noteworthy that this industry never seemed to be where the actors I interviewed were. It was in “Hollywood”, or “out there”, or in “those books and films, which exploit the interests in the Asian culture” – it was not in Oslo, not in the Norwegian publishing house Cappelen, or in the actors’ own workplaces. Raanes saw that Rais was later exploited in the TV-show, but not in her article on him. Similarly, Hoem saw that the image of suffering children was exploited in *Not without my daughter*, but not in *The Bookseller of Kabul*, in Hoem’s review of it (NRK.no 12.09.02), or in his radio program (Ordfront 07.12.02). Smilden thought that Seierstad exposed Rais in her book, but he also thought that he did not do the same in his article (Smilden 25.02.09). During my research, I did not find a single actor who would have identified him- or herself as an actor in the industry, which exploits “the Afghan Other”. And still something like this undeniably happens.

Here we meet the limits of human testimonies: they do not give a full picture of the industry. Rather, I can sketch the anatomy of this industry “out there” only by being attentive to those spaces or moments in the network where no human actor was present, hearable, or seeable. This is also one reason for my interest in the objects in chapter four: the information the

⁸⁷ As was discussed in chapter two, the idea of irreducibility is typical for ANT, too.

⁸⁸ *Not without my daughter* (1987) was a controversial book by an American woman Betty Mahmoody about her escape from her husband in Iran. In 1991, the book was filmed with the same name.

objects carry should supplement or even compensate for the natural limitations of human testimonies. The forms and the routes of the circulating books may bear witness to something the human actors do not know, understand or reveal.

Referring to something like the anatomy or the logic of an industry presupposes some notion of collective action. However, this collective was difficult to discover or identify. After my investigations, it would be difficult to say that *The Bookseller of Kabul* was made only by Seierstad. The number of actors needed for the book to find its readers is astounding, but still very few of these people – from cover designers to booksellers – would see the book as a collective product, produced collectively by people around the globe, and also by themselves. The actors, whom I interviewed, rarely saw themselves as co-producers of the book. Thus, the testimonies revealed logics no one defined as his or her own.

This, often unacknowledged, collective dimension of the production concerns also the question of responsibility. If power does not result from the decisions of an individual subject, who is responsible for damages made? Does Foucault's claim that power is non-subjective mean that Seierstad should not be held responsible? Is the responsibility rather collective?

Literary institutions have historically solved this problem by tying the responsibility over literary texts to their ownership. As Carla Hesse (1996) has argued, historically, in the 18th century when books started to gain the status of private property, this process was accompanied by another process where authors also became legally responsible for their writings. The modern institutions of literature rest on the notion of the right-bearing and accountable individual author. "The author of books, who had property rights in his or her work, could therefore be held legally accountable for what he or she published." (Hesse 1996, 26–27.) Foucault (1991, 108), too, links the rights of the author and the ownership of discourses to the possibility for being subject to punishment.

Whether the responsibility lies on the individual or on the collective can also be answered by returning to Strathern's (1996) views on how ownership cuts the flow of networks. As discussed in chapter two, Strathern has suggested that what stops – or cuts – the (theoretically) endless expansion of networks is often ownership. According to her, ownership "curtails relations between persons; owners exclude those who do not belong" (Strathern 1996, 524). She uses the example of patents, which like copyrights are intellectual property rights. They are actors that stop the free flow, or extension of actors – and work as mechanisms for exclusion. If one actor can exclude other actors from the network, on the grounds of her ownership, it means this actor can control the network more than others. Consequently, this one owner/actor is also more responsible for the consequences of the network than others. In the case of *The Bookseller of Kabul*, Seierstad has throughout the process held firmly to her

copyrights. This became evident, when Rais made a peculiar suggestion in a Norwegian interview. Rais proposed he could modify the book and publish a pirate version of it. Not so surprisingly, Seierstad disapproved of this idea. She said Rais is “free to write anything he wants in his name, but not do anything like that with my book”. (VG 29.08.03a.)^{xxv} Rais never realised his plan, but the moment is interesting, because that is when – between the lines – copyrights entered the picture as a limiting practice, which keeps the power to change a text in the hands of only few. As Coombe (1998, 51) has noted, intellectual property laws prohibit the production of cultural texts and disenable us from subjecting those texts “to critical scrutiny and transformative appropriation”. According to Coombe (1998, 134), they create conditions for “a dialectical cultural politics shaped by the relationship between those who claim proprietary interests and those who seek to appropriate such signifiers for new agendas”. As will be discussed in chapter four, Seierstad and her publishers also used their exclusive rights to modify the circulating books. Thus, they were able to cut the expansion or the free proliferation of the network and control it. Furthermore, if Rais had tried to appropriate Seierstad’s text for his own agendas, he would have entered the sphere of these dialectical cultural politics, and the copyright law would have worked as a prohibitive boundary for him.

The question over author’s or Seierstad’s responsibility can also work as a footnote to the discussions on intentional fallacy in literary studies (Wimsatt & Beardsley 1946). According to those promoting the concept of intentional fallacy, the intentions of the author cannot determine the fate of the book – and hence they should not be discussed. This is partly also what Seierstad herself said in public. She said that the book seems to live a life of its own (VG 15.01.05).^{xxvi} However, even if the intentions of the author would not be the object of the study, we can still identify moments where the author or other actors make choices, and how these choices influence the biography of the book. Furthermore, even if my approach stresses the collective making of the book, the importance of certain dynamics and the non-subjective nature of power, individual actors still make choices, which can be different. When analysed at the micro-level, the local prop and anchor points of power effects reveal moments when actors could have acted differently. These acts include not only the actual release of the text, but also the selling of rights, the contracts signed etc. An ANT inspired approach can at its best help us to identify, out of the multitude of relations, those moments when actors could have radically changed the nature of the events. It can also help to sketch those “series of aims and objectives” and the “matrix of ends and purposes” that individual actors mediate (Foucault 1990, 95, Dean 1999, 22). But it can hardly give any advise on whether these purposes or objectives are desirable or whether someone made the right decision in a given political or

cultural situation – or what something like “a right decision” or “desirable purpose” could possibly mean. Such normative positions need to be grounded on something else.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ This point reveals the uneasy relationship of ANT and Latour to most forms of Leftist politics. Latour can be criticised for advocating an affirmationist position, which may easily turn to conservatism (Noys 2010). Noys (2010, 86) rightly identifies Latour with a form of reformist voluntarism, which is exactly why the answers to the questions posed in this interlude need to be found elsewhere than from ANT-literature. The space here does not allow further discussion on this, but I believe in the future ANT- and Latour-inspired research needs to take this better into account.

3.4 THE CONTROVERSY SPREADS

After the interlude, it is time to return to the chronology of the case. Once the controversy had started, several actors got involved, and the Norwegian media followed the case closely. Also non-Norwegian media started to report on it every now and then. The senior editor at *Aftenposten*'s culture section, Per Anders Madsen, said in my interview that "it was quite a big news story for the Norwegian newspapers" (Madsen 02.03.09). According to Madsen, also *Aftenposten* started to cover "the controversy quite intensely, because the story had not only one aspect, but more aspects. It pinpointed the different cultural codes. --- In that sense the controversy had wider relevance because it concerned the questions over cultural understanding." (Madsen 02.03.09.)

In the following, I will group the Norwegian debaters of the controversy mechanically into two different camps around Rais and Seierstad. I begin with the alliances evoked by Rais' intervention, after which I discuss those actors who/that supported the book and Seierstad.

Rais' alliances in the controversy

Soon after Shah Muhammed Rais had entered the publicity, he started to gain support – or rather Seierstad started to receive criticism in the Norwegian public sphere.⁹⁰ Already three days after *VG* (28.08.03a) published the article on Rais' discontent, *Aftenposten* (31.08.03) reported that Rais had engaged a high profile lawyer, Brynjar Meling. Thus, Meling turned into a spokesperson for his client, who was in Afghanistan. According to the newspaper, Meling had got the assignment via a middleman. I did not manage to interview Meling, and thus I do not know who contacted whom, and how Rais made the quick decision to hire exactly Meling. As a consequence, however, Meling started to speak for the family, but also other actors soon engaged themselves in the debate.

The public criticism came mainly from academics, but also journalists and activists participated in the debate. The main causes for public concern were the following:

- The methods of the author were dubious, and the reader is not given enough information on the circumstances in which the book was produced. (E.g. AP 29.09.03, AP 05.09.03,

⁹⁰ It is important to note that the actors introduced below did not identify themselves as Rais' allies. In other words, these kind of groupings denote my power over other actors. As these groups do not exist anywhere else than in my analysis, we are dealing with the issues discussed in chapter two: actor-networks end and start where the researcher ends and starts them. In that sense, my decision to identify these actors as Rais' allies is problematic, but I have ended up doing so, because it was Rais' concerns that inspired them to act – and hence there existed at least an unarticulated relation of support between them and Rais. The same hesitations more or less apply to Seierstad's "supporters", too.

Morgenbladet 12.09.03.)

- The author abused the hospitality of the family, and having been their guest betrayed them. (E.g. Dag og Tid 26.4.03, Morgenbladet 12.9.03.)
- The family was not anonymized adequately, even if the foreword to the book implies the opposite. (E.g. Noor Sabah Nael and Jo Bech-Karlsen on TV-show Standpunkt 23.09.03.)
- Inadequate anonymization can cause the family physical danger because of the sensitive issues discussed in the book. (E.g. Noor Sabah Nael and Marianne Sunde on TV-show Standpunkt 23.09.03, VG 11.09.03.)
- The family and Afghans were victimized. (E.g. DB 02.09.02.)
- The book was written from the perspective of the author, imposing her values over the story. (E.g. AP 29.09.03, AP 05.09.03.)
- The book offers an image the West wants to see, and as such makes invisible the existing struggles for freedom and against oppression (AP 26.10.03).
- A participatory observer who describes her work as a documentary has to acknowledge that she is making an intervention into the lives of the informants. Hence, the work necessitates sensitivity and the informants cannot be made responsible for the result. (E.g. AP 29.09.03.)
- The book is not a true story, but rather a defamation of the family and Afghanistan. The honour of the family was hurt, and their privacy not respected. (E.g. Shah Muhammed Rais on a TV-show Først og Sist 19.09.03.)
- The book is orientalist, and strengthens our prejudices instead of trying to help Westerners understand the country better. (E.g. Keshavarz 2007.)
- The book rests on a naïve epistemological assumption that true representations are possible. (E.g. Tvedt 2004.)⁹¹

The academic critique started when anthropologists Signe Howell and Kathinka Frøystad from the University of Oslo, jointly published an article in *Aftenposten* (AP 05.09.03). They questioned the book's mode of representation and Seierstad's decision to erase herself from the text. Howell and Frøystad argued, that the book confirms Western preconceptions about the oppression of women in Islam, rather than conveys the social and cultural context of the family.

When I interviewed Howell, she could not exactly remember how the events followed each other, but she said that on the basis of the reviews she had read on *The Bookseller of Kabul*, she had been "sceptical to the book without having read it", and had thus discussed the problems of the book with her colleagues (Howell 27.02.09). When Rais' concerns came public, Howell's colleague, Frøystad, called her and they decided to write a critique. It was published in *Aftenposten* (05.09.03) the same week they read the book. In my interview, Howell said she wrote the piece with her colleague, because she found "that sort of journalism [done by Seierstad in the book] really very problematic. --- It's much too emotional, much too assertive about things she has no real background to know." She continued: "I think it is a really bad practice to go into somebody's head, for example, and pretend to know that she

⁹¹ The last two points were formulated first later, in 2004 and 2007.

knows what they are thinking. --- It's well written and so on, but it's her, it's not even interpretation, it's attribution." (Howell 27.02.09.)

In my interview, Howell also expressed her dissatisfaction with the article she co-wrote. In 2009, she felt that she and Frøystad had been too polite, and she would have liked to be more critical. But at the time of writing, in 2003, they were cautious of not being completely ignored because of too harsh criticism, Howell said. (Howell 27.02.09). The problem discussed above, of people being afraid of appearing as too critical against Seierstad, was present also in Howell's self-criticism.

A few weeks later, another anthropologist from the same department, Unni Wikan, published her critique in *Aftenposten* (29.09.03). She deplored especially Seierstad's removal of herself from the text, and pointed out the lack of information regarding her knowledge in local languages. Wikan continued for a while to comment the case in the media (see e.g. *Redaksjonen* 20.04.06, *Mediemenerne* 24.09.03), and she also followed the court case, but was not willing to give me an interview.⁹²

Other academics criticised Seierstad in smaller papers, like the lecturer in journalism, Jo Bech-Karlsen, who wrote an article in *Morgenbladet* a week after Howell and Frøystad (*Morgenbladet* 12.09.03). Also Bech-Karlsen criticised Seierstad's decision to stay absent from the text, and he demonstrated how Seierstad's subjectivity continually bursts through in the book. He also criticised her use of inner monologue. In my interview, Bech-Karlsen explained her interest in the book with her wider interest in the reportage genre. He had done research on the subject already for a long time, and he decided to read the book, because Seierstad "had said in many interviews that she considered it to be a reportage book" (Bech-Karlsen 19.02.09). Consequently, Bech-Karlsen "decided to read it as a reportage book and as journalism". After reading, he was "critical of it as journalism. Not that it is not a good book, or nice to read, but when she claims that it is reportage and journalism, then there are lots of problems." (Bech-Karlsen 19.02.09.) In my interview, Bech-Karlsen said that Seierstad "is biased in a way – in a good way, many would say – because she feels for these women, and wants to reveal how they are suppressed by the men, and how this macho society limits their possibilities in many sense. In many ways that's a good thing". But Bech-Karlsen also thought that Seierstad should not have used the family "to promote her attitudes. She is not open on her project. She pretends to write about the real life in Afghanistan, but what is underlining is her own attitude. And I don't think that is quite fair with the reader." (Bech-Karlsen 19.02.09.)

⁹² For the anthropological criticism Seierstad received, see also Myhre 2004.

Because of these concerns, Bech-Karlsen wrote the article, and later he also participated in a large TV debate (Standpunkt 23.09.03).

These actors often concentrated on criticising Seierstad rather than supporting the family or trying to speak for them. Moreover, their interest was soon elsewhere. In my interview, Howell explained why she did not intervene after her first article:

“I kind of lost interest. Either I could have gone on and on, but I felt the debate became very repetitive. It didn't really take on other issues. She kept on saying what she had said, he said what he had said. --- [And there were] quite a lot of rather naïve comments [from the side of her supporters], that she has the right to say what she wants exactly the way she wants.” (Howell 27.02.09.)

Later some academics wrote on the case in academic journals. At least two academic articles, that heavily criticised Seierstad and the book, were published in 2004 (Tvedt 2004, Gulbrandsen 2004). Also a professor in literature at the University of Oslo, Arne Melberg wrote in 2005 in his book that Seierstad colonises the people she meets and the environment she writes about (Melberg 2005, cit. Bech-Karlsen 19.02.09).

If the academics concentrated on Seierstad, journalists were more often interested also in the family. This became easier, because Rais flew to Norway on 16th of September 2003, less than three weeks after *VG* had published its article. Did he find spokespersons for his cause amongst journalists?

For professional journalists, the family offered material, as Raanes said:

“The media of course loved him, and that he came all the way from Kabul, with his strange appearance and the strange things he said. Also because Åsne is such a famous person, now there was a person who talked against her.” (Raanes 16.02.09.)

He was interviewed, or the controversy was debated on NRK's TV-channels in seven different programs in the week following Rais' arrival.⁹³ One of the programs was a half an hour round table discussion of some 20 people (Standpunkt 23.09.03). This discussion included for example Seierstad, her publisher Heger, and her lawyer Cato Schiøtz, the above mentioned Meling, and Bech-Karlsen, via satellite connection a famous Swedish author Jan Guillou, two Afghan women (Noor Sabah-Nael & Anousheh Horiat), and a Norwegian bestselling author Anne B. Ragde. A half an hour program on a national TV-channel with satellite connections and famous participators can be read as a sign that the case interested Norwegian media and

⁹³ Frokost-TV 16.09.03; Dagsrevyen 16.09.03; Dagsrevyen 18.09.03; Først og Sist 19.09.03; Redaksjon 22.09.03; Standpunkt 23.09.03; Mediemenerne 24.09.03.

Norwegians. Rais was not present in this debate, but instead his lawyer acted as his spokesperson. Maybe this happened because four days before the debate, Rais had built a relation with media, which seemed to be quite detrimental for him. Rais appeared on the TV show *Forst og Sist* on 19.09.2003. *Aftenposten* (19.09.03) reported already about the fact that Rais will appear in the show – which indicates that the show was an important forum. A few weeks before interviewing Rais, the host of this most popular TV-show in Scandinavia, Fredrik Skavlan had supported Seierstad in the media by saying: "I take it for granted that Åsne is doing her job properly. She is a reliable journalist and a good colleague." (Nettavisen 29.08.03). Between 2000 and 2004, Seierstad had visited the show altogether five times. Without having to know about their possible friendship, it is obvious that an alliance between Skavlan and Seierstad was strong when Rais visited the show. In his eight minute interview, Rais claimed that Seierstad had promised to stop the book internationally, to rewrite it, and to give him the future income. He also said Seierstad and her publisher had offered him money, if he did not take the case to court. The host doubted all this – and referred to Seierstad who had not promised the things Rais claimed. At the end of the eight minutes, two other men entered the discussion, the other one being a journalist for *Se og Hør*, the largest Norwegian yellow press magazine. The show ended up in jokes about the journalist of *Se og Hør* moving into Rais' home.

In Raanes' opinion, "Skavlan [the TV show] was a good example how he [Rais] just fell through. I was home watching it and thinking, my god, poor guy, someone should help him. This is just embarrassing. It was a very big mistake". According to Raanes, Rais tried to "pretend as if he knew Norwegian culture" and joke with the other guests. (Raanes 16.02.09.) She continued:

"He appeared a little bit like a funny person. And that weakened his whole case, I think. Humour is a very cultural thing. He didn't really fit into the debate form we have in Norway, and that weakened his case. [...] I think he should never have appeared in evening TV-shows." (Raanes 16.02.09).

Raanes was not alone thinking that this TV show turned many Norwegians against Rais. During my research, I came across references to this show every now and then when I discussed my research with people. Already before I arrived to Norway, I had heard of this show from Norwegians whom I had met in London, and several of my Norwegian friends referred to it as the biggest failure of Rais. Also the woman working at the TV archive remembered exactly this show, and the senior editor at *Aftenposten* (22.09.03), Per Anders Madsen, wrote in the newspaper that Rais' TV appearances compromised his self-proclaimed victim status. According to him, Rais had coquetted with his polygamy in the weekend's TV-shows and let himself be driven to a flirtatious style.

The day after the show, Seierstad's lawyer announced in the newspaper that Rais had lied, when he said Seierstad had offered him money for compensation (AP 20.09.03). Money was a recurrent theme in the controversy – and the issue was always brought up by the Norwegian journalists, rather than by Rais. In the TV show, it was the host who picked up the question of money. Also at the airport upon Rais' arrival, the very first question posed for Rais by the journalist for the national broadcasting company, was: "You are not here only for money, are you?" (Dagsrevyen 16.09.03) He answered no. Six years later, his wife took the case to court demanding money. However, the opposite answer ("Yes, I'm here only for money") is unimaginable, too. Years later, in the Norwegian Supreme Court (17.11.09), I heard another version of the same discussion between Suraia Rais (translated by her husband Shah Muhammed Rais) and a Norwegian journalist.

Suraia Rais: "For the mistakes she has done, she has to pay."

Journalist: "How much should she pay?"

Suraia Rais: "She should say: I was not right, I was wrong."

It was as if the Norwegian journalists could not imagine any other forms of compensation than money, but simultaneously the wish for it was not (supposed to be) said aloud.

In other words, certain discrepancies between Norwegian expectations and Rais' behaviour started to appear soon after Rais arrived to Norway. The women of the family did not do much better. In the media, they were either absent, ignored, or corrected. As a consequence of the book, which Seierstad called a "women's book" (VG 28.08.03b), it was first and foremost the father of the family who appeared in the public sphere. The women of the family – as well as other Afghan women – remained mainly silent. A search in *Aftenposten's* web archive gave 104 hits for Shah Muhammed Rais, whereas his wife, Aziza, received four hits, and his other wife, Suraia, was mentioned eleven times (on 27.04.10).⁹⁴ As far as I know, only these two women of the family, Suraia and Aziza Rais (both of them married to Shah Muhammed Rais), have appeared in public since the publication of the book. For example the mother of the family, or Shah Muhammed Rais' sister, never appeared in the public sphere. This way the problem of the biased perspective continued to proliferate – not despite the book, but rather because of it. Even when a British journalist, Christina Lamb (who knew both Seierstad and Shah Muhammed Rais) visited the family in Kabul in 2004 and wrote an article about her visit,

⁹⁴ I took into account the different ways of writing their names (Shah Muhammed, Shah Muhammad, Shah Mohammad, and Shah Mohammed as well as both Suraia and Suraya).

she quoted several family members but not these two women (The Sunday Times 10.10.04).⁹⁵ The voices of the women in the family did not find any proper channels in the public sphere, they hardly existed.

Or when these voices existed, they were easily read as signs of patriarchal domination. This happened after Aziza Rais, living in Canada, entered the Norwegian public sphere. Aziza Rais did not extensively take part in the Norwegian debate, but she was briefly referred to when *Ny Tid* published an article about a film project run by Nordisk film. The article stated that according to the “experiences of *Ny Tid*, she [Aziza Rais] feels herself cheated and thinks Åsne Seierstad is not a good person”^{xxxvii} (*Ny Tid* 02/06). In the article, she was not quoted, and this opinion was represented in a magazine with modest circulation of around 9000. However, very soon after this, as a reaction to these opinions, a Canadian freelance journalist, Sonya Velez, who had interviewed Aziza Rais, said in *Aftenposten* (03.06.06) with a circulation of 250 000:

“There is nothing wrong in the fact that Rais' wife [Aziza] supports the family. But if people think that she speaks more freely because she lives in Canada, they make a mistake. Since the bookseller has given permission for the wife and the daughter to give the interview, it is clear that this undermines the credibility [of the interview].”^{xxxviii}

This small incident gives an example of who spoke for whom: Aziza Rais said a few words in a medium size magazine, but this instantly encouraged a Canadian woman to correct her opinions, in a much bigger newspaper. Moreover, it is important to note that when Aziza Rais spoke, also this was read as a sign of her husband controlling her voice. For the voices of Afghan women, there were very few channels outside the book.

Rais becomes an Author

As mentioned above, in the beginning Rais' alliances often found the form of critique against Seierstad, rather than support for the family. Finally, however, some alliances emerged that seemed to put him at the centre of attention and transform his subject position into a direction that would strengthen his role in Norway. In July 2005 Dag Herbjørnsrud, working for a paper *Ny Tid*, contacted Rais and asked him to start as their columnist. In my interview, Herbjørnsrud said that the reason for his interest was the fact that Rais was at that time the most famous Afghan in Norway. *Ny Tid* also had a reputation of promoting writers from all over the world. According to Herbjørnsrud, the paper always looked for different angles,

⁹⁵ I tried to contact Lamb to interview her (as she also wrote a few articles on the case to the UK media), but she did not reply.

dissidents, and foreigners as their freelance writers. Rais fitted their brand very well, and was supposed to write exclusively for *Ny Tid*. (Herbjørnsrud 23.02.09.)

The first article written by Rais was published in November 2005 (Herbjørnsrud 23.02.09). In January 2006, a big Scandinavian media house Egmont bought *Ny Tid*, and it was re-launched in a new format, as a weekly newsmagazine. Rais appeared on the cover of the first re-launched *Ny Tid* (04/06). In his columns he was free to choose his topics, as long as they did not touch the controversy around him, said Herbjørnsrud (Herbjørnsrud 23.02.09). Subsequently, he wrote of such topics as drugs, elections, and eating habits. His picture often appeared on the cover of the magazine, and also in its advertisements (see e.g. *Ny Tid* 31/06, *Ny Tid* 32/06). His column alternated with columns written by such persons as the well-known academic Saskia Sassen and the famous Russian dissident journalist Anna Politkovskaya. He was in a distinguished company of writers, and he seemed to be a valuable asset for the magazine – important enough to appear in their advertisements.

In April 2006, a few months after Rais had established his position as a columnist, he signed a publishing contract for two books with a Norwegian publishing house Damm, also owned by Egmont (AP 26.04.06). Herbjørnsrud was present in the press conference in which the contract was made public. He had participated in the negotiations, and according to him, Damm got the contract because of his role. (Herbjørnsrud 23.02.09.)

The signing of the contract was a media event, but apparently a messy occasion. According to some of my anonymous informants, Rais had simultaneously been negotiating with several publishers with the help of several lawyers. In the conference, two lawyers were present, neither of them being Meling, Rais' first lawyer. The other one of these lawyers, Per Danielsen, continued as Rais' lawyer in the court. According to *Aftenposten* (25.04.06), there had been competition on the rights to his books – and even Seierstad's publisher Cappelen had made an offer. In the newspaper, Rais told he signed the contract with Damm (Egmont) because "they are well organized in Scandinavia, and they gave me the possibility to publish both of my two books".^{xxx} According to the article, the publisher had "committed to publish the book simultaneously in Norway, Sweden and Denmark".^{xxx} (AP 26.04.06.)

But the offers of Egmont did not stop there. Egmont, which publishes media in more than 30 countries, did not only own the magazine *Ny Tid*, and the publisher Damm, but also a film

company called Nordisk film.⁹⁶ In June 2006, a few months after the publishing deal was signed, Nordisk film announced that it had started a documentary film project on the case of the bookseller. The director of the movie, Odd Syse, told me in an e-mail that the agreement with Rais had been signed on 24.05.2006, more or less a month after the publishing contract (Syse 27.01.10). In my interview, he said that the director of the documentary department had introduced the project to him (Syse 20.02.09). The idea came from above. He also said they were offered an exclusive deal, because Rais had a contract with the publisher, which belonged to the same media conglomerate. The working title of the documentary was: “Who is the Bookseller of Kabul?” According to the director, the film was supposed to ask: (1) whether Seierstad abused the trust of the family; (2) whether the controversy was a conflict of cultural differences, or misunderstandings; (3) whether Seierstad and Rais would settle, or would they end up in court. And finally, (4) the film was supposed to tell the version of the family. (Syse 20.02.09.) Whether the film was tied to the publishing contract from the beginning, or whether it was introduced and agreed on first later, remains unclear.

Whatever the order, as a result, all the alliances with the Norwegian media that looked successful for Rais were in the last instance formed with Egmont, exclusively: he was to write exclusively for *Ny Tid*, and also the film rights were given exclusively for Nordisk film.

Rais’ book came out in autumn 2006, four years after Seierstad’s book.⁹⁷ He had announced his idea to write a book already a few weeks after the controversy started (AP 21.09.03). The publishing process was apparently a quick one. The translator, Finn Thiesen, said in my interview:

“I got a phone call from the publisher, they had heard of me, and they needed a translation very quickly, in about a week. --- And I did it. I think in ten days. --- I think there was a book exhibition or something like that where they wanted to have it. So that was really a commercial emergency.” (Thiesen 18.02.09.)

The book could have transformed Rais into something else than a mere speaking subject. He could have entered the same field where Seierstad operated. He could have shrugged off the image the epitexts had produced of him, and produced his own text. Publishing his own book could have narrowed down the differentiation between the author and him – as Foucault’s (1981, 1991) discussion on the author function suggests. However, this first book was still

⁹⁶ For Egmonts organisational structure, see Egmont (2009).

⁹⁷ The limited space does not allow me to describe Rais’ book in detail. Also, because its actor-network did not reach far, I have decided not to discuss it at length. In short, the book is an adventure story where two Norwegian trolls encourage Rais to tell his version of the story.

very strongly linked to Seierstad's book. The name *Det var en gang en bokhandler i Kabul* (2006, Engl. Once upon a time there was a bookseller of Kabul) framed his book as a follow up to Seierstad's. He was identified as the figure of Seierstad's narrative. The book's originality or discursive independence, in other words, was limited. Still in his newspaper article, Per-Anders Madsen, the director of *Aftenposten*'s culture section, called the book Rais' best performance in the Norwegian publicity so far. He liked especially the style, which contained less big gestures than what the Norwegian public had grown used to hear from Rais. In Madsen's mind, those passages in the book that contained pathos were the worst ones. (AP 28.09.06.)

Madsen's comments suggest that the act of writing and authorship mattered, but when he celebrated Rais' style, he implicitly also acknowledged the importance of Norwegian mediators. As a medium, the book is mediated in a very different way than public or live utterances in other media – in which Rais failed to a certain extent. The copy editors in publishing houses have a different role from newspaper editors, not to mention the editors of TV-shows. Moreover, unlike Rais' utterances and speech acts to journalists, which were carried out in English, the book was written in his native language, Persian. Hence, the message Madsen read – and liked more than Rais' previous speech acts – had been mediated by more Norwegians than Rais' other utterances. One key actor in this mediation was of course his translator, Finn Thiesen, who told me in my interview he sometimes had to modify Rais' colourful language to suit the Norwegian taste better (Thiesen 18.02.09). Editors and translators had transformed the message so much that at least the style met some of the requirements of the Norwegian cultural journalist. Madsen's comment proposed that Rais' book was worth more than the other interventions of the family in the sphere of epitexts. Rais was worth listening when he published a book and entered the literary discourse. His subject position as an author was an important factor for the journalist. Similarly, as was discussed in chapter two, Foucault (1991, 107) argues that the “the fact that the discourse has an author's name --- shows that this discourse is not ordinary everyday speech --- not something that is immediately consumable. On the contrary, it is a speech that --- must receive a certain status.”

Madsen was ready to give Rais this status, and so were international journalists, who repeatedly wrote about his book (see e.g. Independent 17.09.06, Guardian.co.uk 07.07.09, Times Online 16.11.07, Irish Times 29.07.10), but in reality Rais' career as an author was short. Rais' book was not a success: beside Norwegian, it was translated only into Brazilian, and by October 2010 Rais' second book had not come out. The infrastructure supporting books did not particularly support his book. In Norway, it was reviewed only by a handful of media, and it did not evoke a wide debate. For example, *Aftenposten* did not review it. Its sales were never reported in *VG* or *Aftenposten*, unlike the sales of *The Bookseller of Kabul*. Most likely

they were not worth reporting. The book was not discussed on TV-, nor in radio programs dedicated for literary matters the way Seierstad's book was, and the institutions of literary criticism did not work extensively for its benefit. When the book was reviewed at NRK's websites, the reviewer wrote that the book is "not great literature". Moreover, she wrote that "there is great inconsistency in his statements. He does not exercise any form of self-criticism, and he gives a glossy image of himself and the other family members. The text confirms the image of a patriarch, who rules the family in his own right".^{xxxii} (NRK.no 28.09.06.) However, she noted that it is important to get this voice heard. The review in *Dagbladet* was titled "Not a good defence from the bookseller", and the opening sentences said the following: "I guess I am not the only one who hoped that Shah Muhammed Rais, a.k.a. The Bookseller of Kabul, would have written a good defence against Seierstad. It is hardly surprising that this is not the case." (DB 27.09.06.)^{xxxiii} The editor in chief for the magazine *KK* wrote that Rais: "does not write well. The adventure of the trolls is a bizarre and a banal story." (KK 16.10.06.)^{xxxiii} The reviewers were obviously not very inspired by the book.

Rais did not become a proper author, in the Foucauldian sense (Foucault 1981, 1991). His writings were not granted a fundamental singularity – which is characteristic for discourses produced by those we consider authors. The difference between the writer and any other speaking or writing subject remained – and his writings did not become to hold the transgressive potential that literature is thought to embody. (Foucault 1981, 63.) As a mechanism, his book did not appear as very effective: it was not carried forward by numerous other actors.

Rais borrowed the forces of some journalists, a magazine and a publisher, but just like any other actor, he could make use of them only as long as the alliances held, or as long as he could gain new alliances. And that was not long. Even if Rais published a book, he did not truly manage to enter the discourse of authors. Also other alliances started to transform. For Latour (2005, 159), these changes are of special interest because a social tie is traceable only when it is being modified. Also if power is relational, it is above all the changes in the alliances that reveal the exercises of power. By enrolling others, the actor is able to borrow their force or even act on their behalf (Callon, Law & Rip 1986, glossary). Rais succeeded in this for a while, but not for very long. His book's biography was short, and the fate of the columns he wrote for *Ny Tid* was partly similar. Less than ten columns were published before he finished. The editor did not want to tell me the reasons for this sudden break up (Herbjørnsrud 23.02.09). These columns did not evoke any public debate. The film project was also closed down, officially due to financial reasons. The director sent Rais a notice on 22.06.2006 stating that there was not enough funding for the project and it had to be frozen for the time being (Syse 27.01.10). This happened only a month after the contract had been

signed! The material that had already been filmed was stored and never shown anywhere. It never built a relation to an audience – not even to me, as the company did not allow me to see the material. (Syse 27.01.10.)⁹⁸

In short, by the end of the year 2006, Rais' alliances did not look good anymore. But his misfortunes did not end there. In June 2007 (11.6.2007), two publishing houses, Cappelen and Damm, merged and formed Cappelen Damm (Egmont 2009). This meant that Rais' publishing house merged with Seierstad's publisher. As explained above, Egmont, which from now on owned the new publisher Cappelen Damm, was originally part of all the alliances Rais had with the *Ny Tid* -magazine, the film and the book publisher. Rais' second book was supposed to come out in 2007, but it was not published. He had publicly told that the reason he chose Damm was the promise for two books and the international prospects. These plans had soon shrunk into one rather unsuccessful book published in Norway and in Brazil.

In the end, Rais self-published his first book in English. The name was *Once Upon a Time There Was a Bookseller in Kabul*. According to Associated Press, the "all-English version was printed in August [2007]" and was "available only in his shop, although he plan[ned] to meet soon with European publishers to have it printed and distributed abroad" (Ohio.com 19.11.07). In November 2007, *Times Online* reported that Rais was looking for an English publisher – this was roughly half a year after the merger (Times Online 16.11.07). In July 2009, *Guardian.co.uk* reported that Rais is close to completing his second book, "about Afghanistan and the war, which he hopes will soon find foreign publishers" (Guardian.co.uk 07.07.09). Rais' Norwegian publisher did not seem to be part of these enterprises – or at least it was never mentioned. Rais spoke to the media as if he did not have a publisher anymore. I emailed Cappelen Damm to ask about the prospects of Rais' second book. In May 2010, I received an email from a rights assistant stating that there were no news regarding his second book, but the email confirmed that he had originally signed a contract for two books (Cappelen Damm 18.05.10). In October 2010, *Once Upon a Time There Was a Bookseller in Kabul* still lacked international distributors: it was not available on Amazon.com, nor on Amazon.co.uk, but only at Rais' own bookshop where it could be ordered by paying via Western Union money transfer (Shah M Book Co 2010). And the second book had not come out.

It is legitimate to assume that the alliances with the Norwegian publishers – and their strength – determined in many ways the careers of the two actors, Seierstad and Rais. I use the word

⁹⁸ In his email Syse (27.01.10) explained that the company did not want to show me the raw material in a different context to what it was shot for – without the authorisation of the Rais family.

assume because these alliances are very secretive. Whenever I asked about details concerning the publishers I faced silence. The alliance between Rais and his publisher (or the media house Egmont) has not looked good after the merger. As a matter of fact, for an outsider, it looks as if this alliance does not exist. I asked several people whether Rais' contract with his publisher was "frozen" because of the merger and the fact that his wife had sued Cappelen Damm, but I never received an answer. The executive director of the publisher, Tom Harald Jenssen, did not answer my interview requests, neither did Seierstad's personal publisher Anders Heger. Other people either refused to comment, or said they did not know.

Rais was, however, hardly any more successful with his other alliances. During the years, several actors lost their interest in the case. For example, the film director, Odd Syse, told me he had not followed the case closely before he was assigned by the head of his department to work as the director, and neither did he follow it after the project was closed down (Syse 20.02.09). This does not mean he was not enthusiastic about the case, but this enthusiasm lasted only for the time he was appointed for the project. Smilden, who was the first journalist to meet Rais after the launch of *The Bookseller of Kabul*, said he did not get involved when Rais came to Norway because he was busy doing something else (Smilden 25.02.09). The other journalist, Raanes, who gave Rais the English translation, did not continue to follow the case, because she did not identify herself as an actor in the case and did not want to be remembered as the person trying to destroy Seierstad (Raanes 16.02.09). The editor of *Ny Tid* fell out with Rais for a reason or another. And an academic, Terje Tvedt who had criticized Seierstad's writings (Tvedt 2004), and supported Rais' visa appeals (DB 31.12.05), never had any other than scholarly motives for what looked like support. In my interview, he said:

"I have been working on how Norway has related to the non-European world in different aspects, and also how Norwegians have conceptualized the rest of the world. That was my background. I was not particularly interested in the book, I was not particularly interested in Åsne Seierstad, nor in the Rais family. Not at all." (Tvedt 06.03.09.)

Another academic, Howell, did not continue the debate because she lost interest and found it repetitive, as was mentioned above (Howell 27.02.09). Neither did Rais' translator (for the book and *Ny Tid*), Finn Thiesen, have other motives than purely occupational (Thiesen 18.02.09). He explained the reasons for doing the translation in my interview: "I got an email, if I could do it very, very quickly, and they paid me well, also. I think they paid me 40 000

kronors which is more than you usually get. It was a challenge, and well paid, so I did it.” (Thiesen 18.02.09.)⁹⁹

It also happened that people, who showed Rais some understanding or criticized Seierstad, were attacked privately. Raanes felt this personally:

“When I published the article, a lot of women called me all over Norway, doctors, teachers, all kind of women, and they were so angry at me, cursing me, and saying that I was working against the Afghan women. That was interesting for me, because that was absolutely not my intention.” (Raanes 16.02.09.)

Also a famous anthropologist Thomas-Hylland Erikssen, who had interviewed Rais in a literature festival and afterwards written an article on him with the title, “Our man in Kabul” (DB 07.06.06),^{xxxiv} told me that he had never before received as much hate mail as he did after showing some public support for Rais – even if in his own words he was used to hate mail.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, two people told me how either Seierstad or her publisher had personally attacked them after they had said publicly something that could be read as support for Rais. And because the intellectual elite in Norway is rather small, being in bad terms with “the most powerful man in the book publishing industry”, or with “the most powerful writer”, is not what people with intellectual interests are necessarily looking for. On the other hand, Seierstad was also able to get some of her critics on her side. One person told me Seierstad had contacted him/her privately, after s/he had criticized her in public. As a consequence, they befriended and the person did not continue to criticize her, and neither did this person want to discuss the case with me. In the case of Rais, it seemed to be vice versa: rather than gaining new allies, he lost them over the course of time.

Rais remains a foreigner

Simultaneously with the events discussed above, there was one more set of actors that might have had a strong influence on Rais’ (un)success. Among other things, ANT encourages us to look for those actors that might hinder or prevent an actor from enrolling others, and thus becoming stronger. I will finish this subchapter by discussing one such hindrance.

⁹⁹ In addition to these people, there was, however, an informal circle of people who wanted to help the family, giving advice and trying to work as mediators in the case. But when I asked who these people were, no one told me any names. These alliances were private, and not working in the public sphere.

¹⁰⁰ This happened in a public seminar at the Department of Social Anthropology at University of Oslo where I presented my work in February 2009 (exact date is unclear).

If power is relational, and if “we have to make sense how the “social” interacts with other materialities” (like technologies, borders, and texts) in order “to understand what stabilizes social relations to generate power effects” (Law 1991, 166), in the case of *The Bookseller of Kabul*, geographical proximity and ability to move seem to be important material aspects. They have significance despite electronic media and communication technologies. Thus, let us move on to discuss movements and borders.

In 2005, little before his third trip to Norway, Rais said in an interview in *Aftenposten* that his family considered applying for an asylum most likely in Sweden (AP 01.11.05). As a consequence, the Norwegian visas of the family were frozen (UDI 03.11.05). Ever since, the question of Rais’ visa applications and their rejections has shadowed the case.

Officially, Rais was given an option. In its press release, the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI) stated:

“If Rais wants to seek asylum in Norway, he can do this through the embassy in Islamabad. Also this application will be processed in the Directorate of Immigration in the usual way.” (UDI 03.11.2005.)

In practice, this was, however, not the case. As the deputy director of the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration, Frode Forfang said in my interview:

“You cannot apply for an asylum in Islamabad for Norway. Normally that application will be rejected for formal reasons, because Norway has no obligation to process application for asylum unless the person is in Norway, or on the border to Norway. --- We have several hundred people, thousand people, every year applying for asylum at embassies and they are rejected on formal reasons. We don’t even look into the cases.” (Forfang 04.03.09.)

In other words, following Forfang’s testimony, Rais could have applied for an asylum in Islamabad, but in practice that application would not have been taken into account. Publicly the directorate gave an impression as if Rais had a rational option, while privately the official denied this. The European immigration system, like many others, is thus paradoxical: even if you would be in need of protection and asylum, in practice, you cannot apply for it unless you are on the European soil. And you cannot get on the European soil, if you come from a country – like Afghanistan – where many people are in need of protection. The deputy director of Directorate of Immigration said, in my interview, that Afghanistan is an “asylum producer” (Forfang 04.03.09), and this naturally keeps the immigration offices vigilant. Rais faced this paradox: because of the fear of him applying for an asylum, he was not granted even a visiting visa to Norway.

Rais was, however, not left entirely alone with the Directorate in this debate. In an interview in *Aftenposten*, a Norwegian board member of PEN international, Eugene Schoulgin said:

“Both the officials and the press in Norway have treated the bookseller badly. He is ridiculed and suspected. First we took his honor, glory from him, and ridiculed him. I think Norway has a moral obligation to treat him decently. That he is ridiculed and then refused a visa, is outrageous.”^{xxxxv} (AP 27.11.05.)

A month later, professor Tvedt wrote in *Dagbladet* that in our global era to prevent Rais from entering the country cannot but influence Norway’s reputation, its self-image and in the end its capability to manage globalisation (DB 31.12.05). According to Tvedt, Rais had made history by arriving in Norway, and by insisting that Seierstad’s representation of his family was wrong. Tvedt was not trying to say that Rais had it right, but rather that the events could have formed a collective learning process for Norwegians, who have a centuries long tradition of representing the Other without ever getting any feedback. (DB 31.12.05.)

In a similar fashion, in January 2006 some members of the literary establishment published an open letter in support of Rais’ visa application. Rais’ book was about to be launched, and he was not allowed to enter the country. The open letter stated:

“That a writer is prevented from being present at the launch of his book is an attack against the right to freedom of expression. We see it troubling that the Norwegian authorities do not comply with a fundamental human right, a human right that Norway has pledged to defend.”^{xxxxvi} (Forleggerforening 2006.)

Two months later, the family was granted a visa (AP 23.03.06). According to the Directorate, the main reason was the invitation Rais received for the Norwegian literature festival in Lillehammer (Forfang 04.03.09, UDI 29.09.2006). He was acknowledged by the literary institutions, which seemed to help with immigration procedures: the literary speaking subject was allowed to move. The differentiation between speaking subjects – that Foucault wrote about – was again at play, even if this time it saved Rais. Consequently, part of the family arrived to Norway, and Suraia Rais gave a speech at the literary festival (AP 31.05.06).

When the visas of the family were withdrawn for the first time, and when Rais complained and appealed for a new process, he promised in public that he would not apply for asylum in Norway (AP 08.11.05). In April 2006, Suraia Rais and three children of the family, however, applied for asylums in Sweden. This first became public in July (VG 15.07.06). According to the so-called Dublin Convention, the country, which has let the person enter the Schengen area, is also responsible for a possible asylum application. This country was not Sweden but Norway: in other words, the family was in the hands of Norwegian officials. Consequently, many of Rais’ future visa applications were rejected (see e.g. AP 13.09.06), because a family in Schengen-area is considered to increase the risk that the visa holder will not return to his/her home country, as the UDI-director told me (Forfang 04.03.09).

Subsequently, because Norway did not grant visas, Rais visited the country and his family on a German visa (Danielsen 17.02.09, Forfang 04.03.09). Most likely the motives expressed in the

German applications have not included one of the real reasons: visiting his family in Norway. As the UDI-director said in my interview: "I don't know what was actually the purpose of the visa to Germany, because normally if the purpose is to visit Norway, you should actually apply in the Norwegian embassy. Maybe he had some business to do in Germany." (Forfang 04.03.09.)

When I asked the UDI-director why Germany granted the visas, even if Norway did not, he believed it was because Germany lacked the information – not because of different policies (Forfang 04.03.09). Had German officials known that Rais has a family in the Schengen area, they would most likely not have given him the travel documents. This is of course speculation, but reflects the logic of an immigration official. According the UDI-director, this situation will, however, soon change thanks to a Europe-wide database. He welcomed this development:

"In the future we will have a new visa information system, where all applicants of visas to Schengen area will have to give biometrical data ---. That data will be stored in a European database, which means that as soon as a person has applied for a visa, you will see for example his history of visa applications. When that system is implemented, if he [Rais] then applied for a German visa in Kabul, then the German embassy would immediately see that he has also applied to Norway and been rejected, which means the Germans would be alarmed. That does not mean they could not grant a visa, but they would have the information, which would probably lead to a consultation before the visa would be granted. Today the visas are processed in each embassy individually, and there is no...well...they could voluntarily contact another embassy and check whether they have had this person, but there is not a system where you could automatically see the history of that person." (Forfang 04.03.09.)

In other words, the database would significantly decrease Rais' possibilities for getting a visa to the Schengen area. From the point of view of the Directorate this is good news, but from the point of view of freedom of movement the news is rather bad.

The case of *The Bookseller of Kabul* and Rais' visas, thus, invite us to ask, whether building, and especially keeping, alliances is possible without the possibility to legally move.¹⁰¹ In the beginning, Rais was very successful in building alliances with other actors: he got two publishing contracts, a film project, a position as a columnist, and many journalists interviewed him. When his visa was withdrawn for the first time, several people wrote in his support. But these kind of appeals disappeared over the course of time, even if Rais' visa applications have been rejected several times. The same has happened with many of his other

¹⁰¹ Moreover, Rais was already from the beginning in a better position than most Afghans would be when defending his case. He could read and speak English, he was relatively wealthy, he knew dozens of international journalists, and he had access to telephone and email and knew how to use them – in other words, unlike many Afghans he could be quickly contacted by a Norwegian journalist based in Norway. His privileged position could be seen also in his ability to arrive to Norway in September 2003, only little more than two weeks after the publication of the article in *VG*.

allies and supporters. During those years that he has had problems entering the country, he has lost his publisher, his position as a columnist, and the film project has been closed down. As said, few of his former public supporters are following the case anymore. He also might have lost his credibility because of the immigration procedures. Strictly speaking, Rais did not break his promise not to apply for asylum – as he did not apply himself, and even those who applied, did it in Sweden, not in Norway. In practice, however, this could be read as lying and betraying the audience. As Madsen said in my interview:

“I think that he also lost his credibility, because as I remember it, he stated that it was not in his mind at all that he would apply for asylum – because he had his family in Canada, and he was just coming here to find sources for his work, his books. And when it came out that his wife and one of his sons applied for visa [asylum], his former statements came also into new light. And I think he had some problems with his credibility after that.” (Madsen 02.03.09.)

In contrast, Seierstad was often interviewed for big foreign newspapers when abroad, for example in Athens (Guardian 03.11.03), or in London (Guardian 09.12.04). Her promoting tours brought her international publicity, but these tours necessitated freedom of movement. In order to truly engage foreign journalists, it looks like she needed to travel and to be able to travel.

Of course reasons for Rais’ lost alliances are not to be found only in border control, but I find it important to put emphasis on those elements that easily pass the eye when discussion turns to literature, freedom of speech, and their regulation. Other reasons for the lost alliances include naturally the family’s behaviour. As long as everything went fine, and the family had no claims because of the book, neither monetary nor in the form of protection, there was support. However, the alliances of the family started to break down when the family started to demand money in court, and use the opportunity to get out of Afghanistan.

Seierstad’s alliances in the controversy

The criticism the family initiated was further discussed or supported by those criticising the book and Seierstad in the Norwegian public sphere. Rais also found support in the Norwegian media and publishers – at least for a short period. The dynamics of these alliances and their breakdowns were discussed above, but their instability was of course also influenced by the support Seierstad received. Rais and those who worked with him – or criticized Seierstad – were not alone modifying the alliances around the book. The support Rais received, and the criticism Seierstad encountered, were faced with counter arguments as many actors aligned behind the book in the controversy.

In contrast to Rais’ challenges with the media and his publisher, Seierstad’s alliances with her

publisher, did not seem to get visibly weaker because of the controversy. In 2004, she re-launched her book on Serbia (Seierstad 2004e), and in 2007 she published a book on Chechnya (Seierstad 2007b), both by Cappelen or Cappelen Damm. Her books also continued to build alliances with foreign publishers and media. Her next book on Iraq was sold at least for six foreign publishers before the manuscript was even handed in (AP 16.10.03). According to an email received from Seierstad's literary agent, by February 2010, *The Bookseller of Kabul* had sold "definitely more" than 2 000 000 copies (Høier 01.02.10), and in March 2010 the publication rights had been sold to 41 countries or language regions (Høier 2010).¹⁰² Moreover, Norwegian public funded bodies had given monetary support for the translations – which will be discussed below. Seierstad had also received several awards internationally, for example a British multicultural EMMA award in 2004 (Norway 2009). The biography of the book looked good.

These – often contractual or economic – alliances helped, above all, Seierstad's messages to proliferate and find new readers. But the book and the author also received more intellectual support. In the Norwegian public debate, arguments in support of Seierstad and the book – particularly in 2003 – included mostly the following (as formulated by Seierstad herself and others):

- The book gives voice to the oppressed women of Afghanistan. (E.g. AP 23.09.03.)
- It was a necessary story to tell. (E.g. AP 17.09.03.)
- It needed to be published because oppression and taboos have to be revealed. (E.g. AP 27.09.03.)
- The principle of freedom of speech should not be compromised. It should be valued over such principles as honour and privacy. (E.g. AP 17.09.03, AP 18.09.03.)
- The book only tells the truth. (E.g. Seierstad on TV-shows Redaksjon 22.09.03 and Standpunkt 23.09.03.)
- The author and the family had a clear agreement that Seierstad lived in their home to write a book. (E.g. Seierstad on a TV-show Redaksjon 22.09.03.)
- The author could not give the manuscript for the family to read, because in that case the book would never have come out. It is supposed to tell the story of the women of Afghanistan, and hence it is little surprising that a man opposes it. (E.g. Seierstad on a TV-show Redaksjon 22.09.03 and VG 28.08.03b.)
- The author could not anonymize the persons adequately, because the context (that of the

¹⁰² These were Norwegian, Swedish, Brazilian, Lithuanian, Danish, Hungarian, Russian, US, UK, German, French, Estonian, Czech, Latvian, Dutch, Spanish, Greek, Polish, Icelandic, Italian, Catalan, Finnish, Portuguese, South Korean, Slovenian, Serbian, Bengali/Bangladesh, Japanese, Hebrew/Israel, Indonesian, Turkish, Bulgarian, Romanian, Hindi, Chinese, Thai, Arabic, Albanian, Ukrainian, Taiwanese, and Georgian. According to some sources, there is also a pirate version published in Iran (AP 26.05.06, Oslo Tingrett 2010).

bookshop) was important for the story. (E.g. Seierstad on a TV-show Redaksjon 22.09.03.)

I summarize these arguments to give an overall picture of the conflict. However, I will not engage in a deeper analysis of each argument, because it is not any intrinsic qualities of these arguments, which make them actors in the case. Rather, their meanings and success are effects of their interaction with other actors. As Latour says: "the status of a statement depends on later statements" (Latour 1987, 27–29). In chapter two, I discussed the importance to see ideas themselves as actors. I believe this is best done by following the uses of certain ideas that come close to one another, and by investigating how they relate to each other. Arguments in favour of freedom of speech or honour and privacy, for example, should first and foremost be read as mechanisms, the efficiencies of which can be understood only by following how different spokespersons make use of them. Out of the above listed opinions, in the following, I pick one strong and efficient cluster of arguments, that grew out of the controversy through a chain of spokespersons. I start by investigating spokespersons who published their opinions in *Aftenposten* in the first few weeks after the controversy started.

Already in the beginning of the debate, the strongest public arguments in favour of the book combined two views: the need to reveal the oppressive sides of Afghanistan, and the idea that Seierstad should have the freedom to do so. Later, the freedom of expression was also the strongest argument used in the court in favour of Seierstad.

The very next day after Rais' discontent had come public, a Norwegian journalist, Kathrine Aspaas, published in *Aftenposten* a text in support of the book with a title "A Deliberate betrayal" (AP 29.08.03). She argued that Seierstad had fooled Rais into believing she was going to write a book about Afghan culture, instead she made an intimate portrait of his family. However, she stressed that Seierstad's act was necessary in order to expose male oppression in Afghanistan. According to the caption, Seierstad "chose to tell the story rather than to protect the source. It has happened before, and it must happen again."^{xxxvii} In Aspaas' opinion, despite Seierstad's deceit, the book was ultimately justified, and it was important because it characterizes further our image of Afghan society.

In my interview, Aspaas said that with her article she was taking sides in the debate, and she explained this by referring to her feminist motives: "I just wanted to sort out that what Seierstad did was not sympathetic, but maybe it had to be done. That's where I stand as a feminist. --- I think the book boils down to a feminist project, even if no one would admit it. I would admit, because I think it is important." (Aspaas 24.02.09.)

In the article, Aspaas wrote: “No journalist can be a witness of systematic assaults without telling about it, and murder can never be camouflaged with the term culture. It is our duty to report of assaults done in the name of culture.” (AP 29.08.2003.) Aspaas’ views echo the attitude described in the interlude I: it is above all culture which is problematic, and this Muslim culture has to be uncamouflaged, unmasked, or unveiled – because of feminist reasons.

Another commentator, Aud Blegen Svindland, wrote an open letter to *Aftenposten* about two weeks after Rais’ arrival to Norway, saying that the family should thank Seierstad because:

“Seierstad has given Afghan women a face in public, and I feel that the story is largely aimed at showing the oppression of women and children. A whole world has opened their eyes to this, and it will have an effect on the world’s opinion, and increase action against the discrimination of women.” (AP 23.09.03)^{xxxviii}

Here Afghanistan needs to be “shown” very much in the line of the feminist tradition discussed in the first interlude. Visibility, transparency, and even exposure of Afghanistan are seen as feminist tasks.

The arguments expressed by Svindland and Aspaas found their stronger versions in a text written by two Norwegian bestselling authors, Unni Lindell and Anne B. Ragde. They published a text in *Aftenposten*, in support of Seierstad, and wrote the following:

“An author’s task is to represent reality – reveal lies, taboos, and what is veiled. Out of extreme politeness comes no good literature. Volatile truths can and must be drawn to light, even if they must be “drawn by the tail.”^{xxxix} (AP 27.09.03)

This task to reveal what is veiled turned into a duty in the following sentence, where the authors continued:

“The freedom of expression is not a freedom, it is a moral duty. Freedom of expression is one of the grounding pillars of democracy, maybe even the most important. Without the right to truthful expression, there is no participation, no possibility for change or development.”^{xl} (Ibid.)

As shown above, the word duty was also used by Aspaas, when she referred to journalist’s duty to report on assaults. Lindell and Ragde linked freedom of expression and *The Bookseller of Kabul* directly to democracy, development and the possibility for change. Furthermore, for them this imperative can override other freedoms or rights, because freedom of expression is maybe “the most important” grounding pillar of democracy. According to the authors, for example the right for privacy should not put limitations to freedom of expression, because:

“this book is not about private life in Afghanistan. When the private is a key feature of a society, it is not private anymore. Then the private is the truth, which must be presented. And anyone who knows the truth has a duty to disclose it further. Seierstad has done that.”^{xli} (Ibid.)

According to these authors, everything, including privacy and politeness, can and should be sacrificed in the name of good literature or truth, but simultaneously freedom of expression has to be sacrificed in the name of development or democracy. Furthermore, private life and society are presented as synonyms, which means that a private story about an Afghan family is essentially a story about Afghan society. This echoed the reviews discussed earlier, in which the family was made to represent Afghanistan.

The two authors also underlined the need to give authors not only the freedom to publish, but also the right to receive only certain kind of criticism. They begin their commentary by writing:

“To write and publish books costs. To offer one’s own personal texts for the public sphere, can be stressful. An author is someone who still dares and chooses to do just that. The price one pays for this is to expose oneself for public criticism from all quarters, from large and small, from the wise and the foolish. But one expects that this criticism is unbiased and open, even though it is hard and merciless. One expects no personal attacks.”^{xlii} (Ibid.)

Later on they conclude:

Everyone has the right to criticise Seierstad. That is also freedom of expression. But the nadir of objectivity above a highly respected colleague, we are witnessing, frightens us.”^{xliii} (Ibid.)

As discussed above, Foucault (1981, 63) has written on the contingent “difference between the writer and any other speaking or writing subject”, and the constant need to stress a dissymmetry between creation and other uses of the linguistic system. Lindell and Ragde’s text highlights this differentiation between speaking subjects (that of an author who is named a “highly respected colleague” and anyone criticizing her). According to the two authors, Seierstad (like all authors) has a duty to write impolite truths (even about private life and individuals), whereas the criticism towards her should be polite and stay within the frames of impersonal criticism.¹⁰³ In other words, the discourse attached to the author function has different rules from those discourses that try to criticize the actual uses of this function.

Noteworthy is also how Lindell and Ragde name Seierstad as an author, whereas for example Aspaas refers to her as a journalist. This double role granted to Seierstad seems to capture something essential about the controversy: because there was no consensus about Seierstad’s

¹⁰³ In order to find explanation for what looked like a contradiction in my eyes, I contacted Ragde. Ragde replied to my first email saying she would be happy to answer my questions by email. For my second email (which I sent more than a year later), she did not reply. I never managed to contact Lindell because I did not find her contact details and her publisher did not respond to my email.

professional identity (or the book's genre), commentators could endorse or judge her according to their own interests. No professional norms or criteria could be automatically applied to her.

Lindell and Ragde's commentary also reminds us of the aforementioned writings of Yegenoglu (1998), according to whom there exists a metonymic association between the oppression of Muslim women and the essence of the culture. It also points towards the culturalist paradigm discussed by Razack (2004) in the Norwegian context. Lindell and Ragde have participated in the discourse Razack (2004) discusses also later, for example by signing the open letter (mentioned in interlude I) against the use of veil in public sector jobs in Norway.¹⁰⁴ This petition was initiated by Human Rights Service, a Norwegian feminist organisation fighting for immigrant women's rights, which in Razack's (2004) opinion is one of the strongest advocates of culturalist explanations in Norway. Aspaas, on the other hand, received attention in 2004 when she published in *Aftenposten* an open letter to Mullah Krekar, the former leader of the Islamist group Ansar al-Islam (AP 02.05.04). In the letter she criticised him for "representing everything we have tried to get rid off in Norway for the last 300 years" (AP 02.05.04). In my interview, she said that in the case of the bookseller, the private conflict between Seierstad and the family unfortunately overshadowed "the real conflict, which is the clash of civilization" (Aaspaas 24.02.09), thus reflecting culturalist argumentation.

When discussing *The Bookseller of Kabul*, all these writers lingered around the argument that revealing the private life of the family was both legitimate and desirable for feminist reasons. Also Seierstad's publisher, Anders Heger used similar kind of argumentation in a text published soon after the controversy started (AP 17.09.03). Heger, who later became the president of the Norwegian PEN (the worldwide association of writers, known especially for defending freedom of expression), wrote that the book leads to a "difficult area where terms such as 'privacy', 'honour' and 'tradition' must be weighted against the magnitude of those of 'visibility', 'human dignity' and 'truth'" (AP 17.09.03).^{xliiv} Heger does not directly answer which group of terms has more weight, but his opinion can be read in the closing sentences of his text. He refers to the praise the book has received in *The Guardian*, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, *The Observer*, and *La Repubblica*, and writes that these papers have understood that

¹⁰⁴ See the petition, Human Rights Watch (2009).

“the story Åsne Seierstad tells in the book is necessary, credible and worth telling. Exactly these reasons lay behind the publisher's decision [to publish the book], and because of them – without hesitation – the publisher would do it again”.^{xlv} (AP 17.09.03)

Heger suggested that the praise the book had received internationally (combined with the need to tell the story) legitimized the alleged invasion of privacy. In my interview, Aspaas expressed similar sentiments: “Obviously the book was needed, and it was needed globally, as well, because it has become a bestseller.” (Aspaas 24.02.09.) Also, Seierstad’s lawyer used analogous kind of argumentation, when he supported Seierstad by referring to *Newsweek*’s review. Three weeks after the conflict started, Seierstad’s lawyer said there were no reasons to make any big changes to the US edition, neither were there any reasons to withdraw the book. In a newspaper interview the lawyer said: “In the United States the freedom of speech is thought of very highly. It is impossible to stop the book there. It is already an international bestseller. The review in last week’s *Newsweek* shows this. Not any sort of book gets reviewed there.” (AP 18.09.2003.)^{xlvi} Just as Heger, also the lawyer referred to big foreign newspapers when supporting the book.

Heger’s comments created an alliance between the controversy in Norway and the international praise in *The Guardian* and *The Observer*. This comment led me to follow the book’s trajectory to the UK and to the home of the journalist who had praised Seierstad’s book internationally, in other words in *The Observer*.

The Observer published its first text on *The Bookseller of Kabul* on 31st of August 2003, three days after the controversy started in Norway. Heger is right that the review in *The Observer* drew a very positive picture of the book (Observer 31.08.03). According to the review, the book “deserves to sell well: it is quite unlike anything else”. It describes Seierstad’s decisions as clever and the book as fascinating, and does not refer to the controversy. In my interview, the reviewer Tim Judah, said he did not discuss the controversy in the review, because he had not heard of it before writing the text (Judah 15.02.10).

Judah told me that he thought Seierstad’s book was necessary, because

“all stories about Afghanistan are necessary, aren’t they, with this current conjuncture when there is a war. Anything that tells us more about Afghanistan and contemporary Islam societies is useful. But it [Seierstad’s book] was a kind of unique thing, most people can’t do it, spend six months staying with the family.” (Judah 15.02.10.)¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ In reality, Seierstad spent more or less 3–4 months with the family.

But the main reason for the review in *The Observer* lay elsewhere. Judah, told me in an email: “Åsne and I spent much all of that period [during the war] working and travelling together, until the fall of Kabul. She is a friend of mine, so I reviewed the book and wrote a story about the controversy. Simple!” (Judah 19.01.10.) In my interview, he said his friends often ask him to review their books, but he only reviews those he finds good. About the review of *The Bookseller of Kabul* he said: “I did the review because she was a friend of mine and I had been there and I knew the story.” (Judah 15.02.10) He was “happy to help a friend – she would do the same”, but he also added that “it was a good book”. (Judah 15.02.10.) The decision to review Seierstad’s book in *The Observer* was a consequence of Seierstad’s personal alliance with the reviewer. *The Observer* had little influence on this, as according to the reviewer: “Big international newspapers don’t have brains, they have people who offer editors things to fill blank spaces which the editors need to turn into pages every day” (Judah 19.01.10.)

But the interest of *The Observer* and its sister paper *The Guardian* did not end here. More than three weeks after the controversy started in Norway, the same journalist, Judah, wrote an article about the conflict for *The Observer* (21.09.03). It was a rather balanced account of the controversy including views from different people. Like the review, also this article framed the story as a clash of civilisations. More or less the same article was published a few days later in *The Guardian Weekly* (25.09.03) – *The Guardian*’s international edition – and a little more than a week later, *The Guardian* (03.11.03) published another article about the controversy, which was mainly constructed around an interview with Seierstad. This latter article was carried out in Athens where Seierstad was promoting her book. The events were described as “a nightmare scenario for any writer”, not for the family, and the article did not include a single line from the family. It portrayed the author as regretful: “I agree that maybe I should have been more careful.” It told that she “has given half the proceeds to charities promoting women’s rights in Afghanistan”. And it also noted that Rais is “far from placated” although “the author has removed offending passages from reprints”. The article closed with a quotation from the author: “What has been really good is all the support I have got from Afghan women abroad. A lot of them have said what you have written is true. You just didn’t go far enough!” (Guardian 03.11.03.) As was the case in the Norwegian early reception discussed above, also in this article none of these Afghan women were heard – but instead the author represented them.

Next spring, again a short review of the book was published in *The Guardian* (10.04.04). Even if by then the controversy had made it to the English publicity, it did not get mentioned in the review. Eight months later, *The Guardian* published an article, which was supposed to discuss Seierstad’s new book on Iraq, but instead dealt mostly with the case of the bookseller (Guardian 09.12.04). In this article, several touchy issues were raised, but Seierstad said in her

defence that “he [Rais] also betrayed me!” “He presented himself as this great liberal.” (Guardian 09.12.04.) The interview had been made in London where Seierstad was promoting her new book. As in the article written in Athens, again what seemed to help a sympathetic interview appear was mobility, a right to travel and geographical proximity. These were not the last articles in *The Observer* and *The Guardian* about *The Bookseller of Kabul*, but these articles created the terms of the debate and the context for the sales in these newspapers (for latter articles, see e.g. Guardian.co.uk 18.07.06, Guardian.co.uk 27.07.10, Guardian 31.07.10).

The examples of *The Guardian* and *The Observer* demonstrate what can be behind international appraisal. First of all, Seierstad’s book entered the paper, because her friend decided to review it. The Afghan side of the story did not easily break into the public sphere in the UK, or when it broke it happened after the book had already been celebrated. But these examples also seem to show, how through the author function books enjoy a status unknown to other forms of discourses. The author was discussed in the reviews and the articles much more than the family – and it turned out to be her tragedy, whereas the family was “at war – with itself”, as the title of the first review in *The Observer* suggested (Observer 31.08.03). It is important to note that the UK and the US newspapers I analysed also included exceptions: *Sunday Times* (10.10.04) published an interview with the family done in their home in Kabul.¹⁰⁶ But on the other hand, *The Sunday Telegraph* (28.11.04) published an interview with Seierstad done in her Oslo home. All in all, it is, however, safe to say that Seierstad was interviewed and her views were covered more often than the family’s, and the interviews often took place when she was on her promotion tours.

These promotion tours, naturally, required certain assets like travel documents (a passport and visas, or visa-free access) and money. Part of the money used for these tours was state funded as NORLA (Norwegian Literature Abroad, Fiction & Non-fiction) funded Seierstad’s travel costs for promotion tours, fairs and festivals, about once or twice a year (Roland 18.06.10). This government-funded, non-commercial foundation, which promotes Norwegian literature abroad, funded for example Seierstad’s trip to Leipzig’s book fair in 2005, because the book was not selling as well in Germany as in the UK and the USA (Roland 18.06.10). The role of NORLA was important for *The Bookseller of Kabul* also in other respect, because it supported the translations of Seierstad’s books. Between 2003 and 2010, NORLA gave translation

¹⁰⁶ As mentioned, I have gone through the coverage of the controversy during the first 18 months in several UK and US newspapers, even though I do not discuss all of these.

support altogether for 15 or 16 international publishers of *The Bookseller of Kabul*.¹⁰⁷

According to Per Øystein Roland, an adviser for non-fiction at NORLA, whom I interviewed, NORLA gives support for the translation of books that have originally been written in Norwegian and preferably first published by a Norwegian publisher (Roland 18.06.10). About 95 per cent of the received applications are funded, and the support covers some 50 per cent of the translation costs (Roland 18.06.10). The support is almost automatic, if the formal criteria are fulfilled (the main criteria being that the publisher has the translation rights). NORLA supported the translations of *The Bookseller of Kabul*, because these international publishers had sent applications. According to Roland, probably all the received applications for Seierstad's book were supported.

NORLA's funding from the government has grown during the first years of the naughties, and according to Roland "the Norwegian politicians have a lot of good will for their work", as it is also a rather inexpensive, way of branding Norway (Roland 18.06.10). However, regarding Seierstad, Roland said that "her books are really international, there is really nothing Norwegian in them, except maybe a set of values". According to Roland, "Seierstad is one of the few Norwegian non-fiction writers who really has an international authorship", and "she belongs to the top three internationally bestselling Norwegian authors of all time". (Roland 18.06.10.) As discussed above, according to some of my informants, this success was partly a result of Seierstad's personal qualities and determination. This view was reaffirmed by Roland. According to him, Seierstad had worked actively to get her book translated into English. Roland said: "Elisabeth Milton at MUNIN [the predecessor of NORLA] worked closely with Åsne Seierstad, also in connection with *The Bookseller of Kabul*. Åsne Seierstad had mailed her samples of the text, and she helped her to translate it into English."¹⁰⁸ This comment highlights Seierstad's own active role in transforming *Bokhandleren I Kabul* into an English book, which later turned the book into a controversy.

A state funded body, in other words, supported Seierstad's international career in the form of funding, and the National Assembly awarded her with the Peer Gynt Award, because of this

¹⁰⁷ These were the publishers in Greece, Poland, Serbia, Bangladesh, Estonia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Netherlands, Georgia, Lebanon, Macedonia, Brazil, Russia, Germany, Latvia, and Spain. The records of Munin and Norla show 15 translations, but according to my research, also a 16th translation, into Spanish (Seierstad 2003d), has received funding. This information about the support for the Spanish translation was found in the first page of the Spanish edition in The National Library of Norway. Other information is from the records I received from Norla in June 2010. Also see the yearly reports of NORLA (Norla 2010).

¹⁰⁸ Before 2003, the department for nonfiction was called MUNIN. In 2003, these organization merged. My information here refers to the support given by both MUNIN and NORLA.

same international fame. This was done, even if Seierstad's books are not specifically Norwegian, or maybe on the contrary, because they promote Norwegian values. These kind of institutional – often state funded, and thus relatively stable – allies are important for any author: they are better allied than many other actors, and can thus give significant material support, which is not available for example for Afghan writers. According to Roland, NORLA supports broadly different genres: “We support both general non-fiction and more specialized books. I think there are not so many countries that are supporting that range of different genres.” (Roland 18.06.10.) This sort of special care Norway gives for its authors had an impact on the career of *The Bookseller of Kabul*.

The book in the court

The support Seierstad received did, however, not save her from the court case. As mentioned already, Seierstad and Suraia Rais ended up in court in June 2010. The trial, which I followed, took place in the Oslo District Court on 14.–16.06.2010. The reason for this civil proceeding was that the plaintiff demanded both Cappelen Damm and Seierstad to pay compensations for the *global* damages the book had caused. Against all the odds, the accusations against Seierstad for invasion of privacy were partly found correct by the judge in the verdict given on 23rd of July 2010: Seierstad and her publisher were ordered to pay compensations for Suraia Rais because the book contained a few incorrect statements (Oslo Tingrett 2010). The court proceeding is described in appendix 2. I have decided to mostly exclude the trial from my narrative firstly because there will probably be several appeals to come, and in that sense the court process is hardly finished. But most importantly, I think that the trial most likely has very limited effects. Its mode of efficiency, so to speak, is highly restricted. The trial could only make the author economically responsible for the individual plaintiff, Suraia Rais, instead of making the circulating object somehow respond to – or take into account – its possible consequences. The court did not – and could not – discuss the book as a mechanism which stabilises power relations, or as a mechanism, which may have consequences also beyond the plaintiff's situation. On the contrary, the judgement acknowledged the freedom of expression of the author and the commodity – as well as the need to receive descriptions of Afghanistan (Oslo Tingrett 2010). Even if the judge made Seierstad pay for the damages, she nevertheless defended the book and acknowledged its importance. On one level, the book carried general interest and, thus, a social function for the judge, who wrote:

“The court admits that the release of the book with its statements and pictures of [Suraia] Rais benefited a public debate which is of great interest. Afghanistan has for a long time had an important place in the news, both in Norway and abroad. In particular, ISAF's/NATO's military operations, and in general the international community's work since autumn 2001, with its view to provide security, stability, and peace in the country, has been subject to constant debate. Part of this [debate] has been

the women's situation in the country. Their situation has been used by many as one of the several reasons why ISAF/NATO and the international community entered the country, and why they remain there." (Oslo Tingrett 2010, 7–8.)^{slvii}

In short, the book both challenged and reinforced social norms to such a conflicting extent that parts of it were not found appropriate in the court. However, *as an object it was also seen as embodying a social need to provide information about Afghanistan*. Consequently, the judge condemned only certain details in the book, while approving its importance for a public debate on the reasons why NATO has a military operation in Afghanistan.

In the biography of the book – and my thesis – the court's decision constitutes a somewhat ambiguous moment. For many commentators it may appear as the closing chapter of the whole case. It was a moment when the acts of the author and the publisher were juridically called into question. The act of giving a material form to a narrative on Suraia Rais was judged in the court. Symbolically, this decision was significant both for the case and for my thesis, as it revealed that the book could be held accountable in the juridical sphere. But at the same time, what happened in Oslo was rather irrelevant. From an ANT-perspective, which stresses the most powerful and materially durable associations, the decision does not play a very significant role in the biography of the book. The court made Seierstad legally responsible, but by then the book had already proliferated in dozens of countries, in more than two million copies. The diffusible object was not contested. Chapter four in this thesis demonstrates, how the trajectories of the book – and its transformations – undermine for their part the significance of the trial and show the limits of this one decision which took place in Oslo.¹⁰⁹

The next interlude, on the other hand, discusses further how authors, or the freedom of expression they exercise, find support in Western societies, perhaps often at the expense of other freedoms.

¹⁰⁹ More information on this peculiar moment in the career of the book is in appendix 2.

INTERLUDE III: FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION DEFENDED, FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT FORGOTTEN

As quoted above, the judge admitted “that the release of the book with its statements and pictures of [Suraia] Rais benefited a public debate which is of great interest”, and she referred to the women’s situation in Afghanistan as a particularly important topic (Oslo Tingrett 2010, 7–8). The statement, in other words, suggested that Seierstad made visible and public views which could, otherwise, have stayed unnoticed.

As mentioned, ANT proposes that mute actors can have spokespersons, who carry their messages. The above discussed anthropologists, the editor, the film director and the publisher helped to carry the messages of the Afghan family further. And conversely, the authors Lindell and Ragde, the publisher Heger, and the two other commentators – Aspaas and Svindland – acted as spokespersons for the book when they defended the principle of freedom of expression. And the judge seemed to imply that Seierstad’s book worked as a spokesperson for a certain view on Afghan women.

However, this sort of public representation of mute actors is not at all an uncontested matter. In her seminal essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?”, Gayatri Spivak has emphasised the two senses of the word representation: “representation as ‘speaking for’, as in politics, and representation as ‘re-presentation’, as in art or philosophy” (Spivak 1988, 275). According to her,

“the staging of the world in representation – its scene of writing, its *Darstellung* [the latter sense of the word] – dissimulates the choice of and need for ‘heroes’, paternal proxies, agents of power – *Vertretung* [the former sense of the word]” (Spivak 1988, 279).¹¹⁰

In relation to this, Spivak (1988) asks in her essay whether it is possible for people in subaltern positions to speak for themselves without assuming a collective subjectivity among heterogeneous people, and without re-inscribing their subaltern position in a society by

¹¹⁰ Spivak has continued this discussion most notably in her book *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (1999), where she looks for the traces of what she calls *the native informant*. According to her, even those texts of European philosophy (Kant, Hegel and Marx) that take the “European” as a human norm, need the figure of the native informant (Spivak 1999, 6). In this thesis, I have mainly chosen the perspective of the war when discussing this large and persistent question: namely, how much does the Westerner/European/Seierstad/her readers *need* the Other/the subaltern/the native informant/the Rais family? Obviously, Seierstad’s book was needed and wanted in the West for various reasons, and I make short references to these multiple needs (be they economical, psychological, or subliminal), but my main focus is on the war, rather than, for example, on the subject formation in/through the Western philosophical tradition.

reclaiming a collective identity. Spivak is doubtful, but Seierstad's book, her responses to the conflict and the support she has received, propose that such a common identity could be found, known, and represented (in both senses of the term) in her book and through her book.¹¹¹

The Bookseller of Kabul, Seierstad's public views on it and the public support it received, can be conceived as a chain of events in which political representation (or substitution) of Afghan women has not been differentiated from the other sense of representation (as description or *Darstellung*). Seierstad's use of direct speech, and her insistence that her representation is a true presentation of how things are, suggest that, according to her, the oppressed can speak and know their conditions, *but* nevertheless need someone to speak for them. This combines the two senses of the word: there is a social will of the Afghan women to be re-presented (described) and also represented (politically). Seierstad has described her book as a women's book (VG 28.8.2003b), thus implying that the book refers to a collective identity, and not only to the women in one particular family. In *KK's* interview she said: "It is perhaps not surprising that the bookseller does not like the book, because it is a women's book, not his. I have told women's history" (KK 39/03b).^{xlviii} She has also said that it is an important book for women in Afghanistan (Redaksjon 22.09.03). Her supporter, Svindland, wrote that "Seierstad has given Afghan women a face in public" (AP 23.09.03).^{xlix} These comments propose that for Seierstad, and for some of her supporters, the two senses of the word representation can be equated, whereas for Spivak this indifferentiation between the two marks the place of interests. According to Spivak, when intellectuals produce themselves as transparent, as merely reporting on the non-represented subject, we are dealing with the intellectual's own interests and ignorance of her institutional responsibility (Spivak 1988, 279–280). Seierstad has often presented herself to the public like this: as a transparent reporter, reporting the voice of those who have not been represented. In an interview, made for *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review*, and attached to the US paperback, she explained her thoughts about the transparency of her narration. The interview quotes Seierstad, who says she had thought that:

"I'm not here to reform one family, --- I'm here to describe how it is. If I started to say, 'That's not how they do it in Norway,' that this is not fair, I would suddenly not get the true story." (Seierstad 2004c, Reading group guide, 3.)

As the previously cited passage from *The Guardian* (03.11.03) showed, Seierstad legitimated this role of hers by referring to "all the support I have got from Afghan women abroad." And

¹¹¹ In her later work, Spivak has discussed the issue of assuming a collective identity from a more positive perspective. For example, her term strategic essentialism can be interpreted as a response to this (see e.g. Spivak 1990a & 1990b).

by saying that “[a] lot of them [Afghan women abroad] have said what you have written is true.” When receiving the British multicultural EMMA-award, Seierstad said that the award she received “is to the women, children, men who have no voice.” (Dagsrevyen 25.05.04). These quotations bring together the idea of a transparent true story (re-presentation) and the idea that Seierstad’s role as a political representative was needed and welcomed because some people do not have a voice – thus equating the two senses of the word.

As briefly discussed in chapter two, ANT-scholar Callon (1986b, 216) has suggested that to “speak for others is to first silence those in whose name we speak”. For him, the question whether spokespersons are representative or not is a practical, not a theoretical one (Callon 1986b, 217). Thus, we need to follow the actors and describe how they engage or silence others; how they – with the help of allies – create themselves as spokespersons or deprive others of this status.

In the case of the bookseller, these general problems of representing those who are thought of not having a voice were accompanied by very spatial and material challenges to make one’s voice heard. Those who were most concerned about the freedom of expression usually discussed it from Seierstad’s perspective. Thus, the debate concentrated on her right to publish what she had written on her experiences in Afghanistan. However, for the Rais family this freedom found also such spatial and material limitations Seierstad had not encountered. The control of immigration put limitations to Rais’ freedom of expression. As of August 2010, the number of countries a Norwegian citizen could enter without a visa was 159, whereas the same number for Afghan citizens was 26 (Henley 2010). The difference is so significant, that we can hardly ignore it when discussing freedom of expression in practice. Because of this regulation of movement, Shah Muhammed Rais could, first of all, not enrol allies the way Seierstad could. But even more importantly, he did not have the same possibilities to do for Norway what Seierstad did to Afghanistan: namely to spend some time in the country as a guest in a family, and afterwards tell the (possibly inconvenient) truths about the country. By controlling immigration, Norway could protect itself from the treatment to which Afghanistan was exposed, through Seierstad’s book, and because of the freedom of expression principle. Hence, one can say that controlling the movement of people also reproduced hierarchies inside the literary field – especially in regards travel writing. The conditions of production are more favourable for certain travel books than for others. Still, countries and their immigration offices have no obligations to take these issues into account. When I asked the UDI-director whether the fact that the book, which made the family move, was a Norwegian book had any influence on UDI’s decisions, his answer was simple: “It is not a Norwegian reason, it was a book written by a Norwegian author. Norwegian authorities have nothing to do with that.” (Forfang 04.03.09.)

Seierstad's freedom of expression, and the book's freedom to circulate, were encountered with Rais' unfreedom to move. Consequently, the case gives evidence to the opinion that the so-called free trade era has brought with it a relative free movement of commodities, but simultaneously a stronger – and more selective – control of the movement of people. As Slavoj Žižek (1998) says:

“One is tempted to resuscitate here the old Marxist ‘humanist’ opposition of ‘relations between things’ and ‘relations between persons’: In the much celebrated free circulation opened up by the global capitalism, it is ‘things’ (commodities) which freely circulate, while the circulation of ‘persons’ is more and more controlled.”¹¹²

From an ANT perspective, which combines human and non-human actors, this is particularly interesting. If materialities stabilize social relations, and if these materialities are freer to move than people, their role as means of domination is even more important than what I have proposed so far: *the circulation of objects is a means to construct and control social relations.*

This is where literature and books reveal their most dubious function: as commodities, which carry intellectual messages, and which are protected by freedom of expression and the free circulation of goods, they participate in the global circulation of ideas. These ideas, however, cannot be challenged on equal grounds, because that would necessitate also freedom of movement. *In the case of the bookseller, the circulation of the story, of literature, was more important than the movement of those people to whom Seierstad wanted to give voice.* This found its concrete embodiment in the difficulties that Shah Muhammed Rais had with his visa applications. The principle of the freedom of expression exercised through literature helps to obscure the other set of unfreedoms which condition how the very same freedom of expression can be exercised. The Rais family has not encountered a simple prohibition to express themselves, or censorship, but the conditions in which they could express themselves (and use their freedom of expression) serve the purposes of the circulating book and the author Seierstad, who can travel. As far as is known, the family has not been involved in illegal immigration, but their routes to Norway follow the common pattern: because immigrants can in practice only apply for asylum when already in the Schengen area, they need to enter the area under some “false” motive. The true motives have to be hidden in order to enter the area. This creates a cycle of betrayals, as the betrayals are built into the system. And these betrayals harmed the credibility of the family, as Madsen (02.03.09) suggested.

¹¹² Of course commodities do not circulate entirely free. Customs still exist, but as an ideal the free circulation of goods has recently been much more on the political agenda than free movement of people. Free trade agreements, WTO, and for example the EU, all promote, and have put to practice, free trade. The EU, of course, promotes also freedom of movement.

These discrepancies between the movement of people and of commodities point towards the structural conditions, or limitations, of the public sphere, or of the discursive exchange in the public sphere. This debate on the conditions is famously complex, and I will mainly need to leave it aside here.¹¹³ It is sufficient to say that one central question of this debate concerns the possibilities for rational discursive exchange without domination. Can we even imagine – or desire – a public sphere where rational argumentation could lead to public consensus, which would not be determined by some class specific or ownership-related operations of domination? This tension between argumentation and domination is well present also in the debates around *The Bookseller of Kabul*. For the book's defenders, for example the status of an international bestseller and a review in a large US weekly newsmagazine (*Newsweek*) were guarantees for its value as a literary piece. The aforementioned references to *Newsweek* or *The Observer* seemed to fall into an idealisation, where the production of knowledge was separated radically from politics and domination. Even if *Newsweek* is a major magazine published in the country leading the war in Afghanistan, Seierstad's lawyer, Cato Schiøtz, presented its review only as a proof of the book's quality, instead of taking it as an exercise in hegemonic politics. Similarly, even if the review in *The Observer* was written and initiated by Seierstad's friend, the resulting review was not read as an exercise in domination or power but as rational discursive exchange.

In the context of the controversy, both parties could in principle participate in the debate, even if in practice the journalist approached their professional colleague, the author, more often and in a different register than the family, and even if the family found borders controlling their movement. According to Terry Eagleton (2000, 16), who has analysed the intertwined history of the ideal of the rational public sphere and literary criticism, property (and interests surrounding it) was the very enabling structure of the 18th century bourgeois public sphere, and of its seemingly disinterested enquiry. Today, we could say that the ability to move plays at least as important a function as property in the previous centuries. The freedom of movement works as an internal condition for freedom of expression – and in the case discussed here, this freedom was not equally distributed.

¹¹³ These debates often take as their starting point the ideal described in Habermas' book *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1991), on which most contemporary conceptualizations of the public sphere are based. According to Habermas, this ideal of a public sphere, which stood for rational argumentation, exchange without domination, and universal participation emerged in the 17th and 18th century, and even if it has collapsed it is still worth being recovered and saved. The critics often refer to the impossibility and even undesirability of such a public sphere (see e.g. Mouffe 1999, Eagleton 2000). Many commentators have also concentrated on the exclusive nature of the public sphere, both as an ideal and in practice (see e.g. Benhabib 1992, 1996, Fraser 1992).

Moreover, not only people, but also books deriving from different countries, written by people of different citizenships, circulate unequally. This is not only because of the market mechanism, but also because of state interventions. As mentioned, the different translations of *The Bookseller of Kabul* received almost automatically funding from a Norwegian state funded institution – whereas books written by an Afghan are hardly supported by such mechanisms. This is why Seierstad's following statement in Times Online sounds little naïve: "I wrote my book, he [Rais] wrote his. That is fine, and the reader can judge" (Times Online 16.11.2007). Slightly unworldly was also the comment made by the cultural journalist Knut Hoem, who said in my interview about Rais' book: "The bookseller turned the story around, he even published a book, where he turned the power structures around. For me that is a kind of democratic development of the situation." (Hoem 26.02.09.)

The discrepancies presented above could be further analysed by recalling Slavoj Žižek's (2002, 2) famous line: "we 'feel free' because we lack the very language to articulate our unfreedom." For him, this is how liberal ideology works: we can acknowledge that we have all kind of freedoms, but we usually lack an essential element in order to articulate or understand the conditions of these freedoms, or the norms which constitute these freedoms (and which are in return constituted by these freedoms). According to Žižek, "our 'freedoms' themselves serve to mask and sustain our deeper unfreedom". In other words, for Žižek, liberal consensus works as a supplement to capitalism: we feel free because of our freedoms, but the choices are usually forced choices. (Žižek 2002, 1–2.)

In the case of *The Bookseller of Kabul*, we can see how literature – and the freedom of expression through it – has become to play a decisive but paradoxical role in our understanding of liberal democracy. As the two authors, discussed above, argued, freedom of expression can be conceived as the most important grounding pillar of democracy. The freedom of expression – and in that way the possibility for democracy – is tested through *The Bookseller of Kabul*: it has to be allowed to circulate freely, because otherwise democracy would be threatened. This testing seems to take place repeatedly especially against Muslims, as for example the Rushdie-affair (see e.g. Pipes 1990) or the controversy over the Muhammad cartoons (see e.g. Kunelius et al. 2007) show. Both have been received as processes where the Western principle of the freedom of speech has been called into question by Muslim individuals or groups.

This freedom is, however, paradoxically not a freedom at all but a duty, as the authors quoted above wrote. This imperative to use one's freedoms is what Žižek (e.g. 2005) has discussed as the key feature of liberal democracies. One *must* use one's freedoms, as the two authors suggest. Truth "must be presented" and "drawn to light" (AP 27.09.03). Were you not willing to use your freedoms, you are accused of escapism, says Žižek (2005). As a consequence,

challenging these same liberal freedoms is not part of the freedoms we enjoy. Because freedom of expression (for example through literature) forms a significant part of the very structures of liberal society, literature should be free but only to the extent that it does not question this freedom or the structures supporting it. The aforementioned incident around Aziza Rais, where her testimony was questioned by a Canadian journalist, can be read in this context. Žižek's (2005, 118) term pseudo-choice might help us to approach the case of Aziza Rais. According to Žižek, we encounter a pseudo-choice when we are formally given a free choice, the conditions of which, however, render the choice unfree. For Žižek, the liberal attitude towards Muslim women wearing the veil works on the level of a pseudo-choice: it is acceptable for Muslim women to wear the veil if it is her own choice, but the moment she abandons the veil it is not anymore taken as a sign of her Muslim identity but as an expression of idiosyncratic individuality. Žižek (2005, 118) continues, "[i]n other words, a choice is always a meta-choice, a choice of the modality of the choice itself: it is only the woman who does not choose to wear a veil that effectively chooses a choice". Similarly, Aziza Rais would have made a free choice only if she had denounced her husband and celebrated Seierstad's book. But because, on the contrary, she supported her family and criticized Seierstad, the Canadian journalist did not interpret her opinion as a choice, but as an act conditioned by her husband.

Following Žižek's thinking, maybe the case of *The Bookseller of Kabul* should not be read, above all, as a case about freedom of expression (and whether Seierstad is granted it or not). Rather, it is a case that invites us to ask how this freedom is conditioned so that it puts different actors in different positions, or even how freedom of expression itself bears witness to another set of unfreedoms. Here we come to Žižek's definition of ideology, which is not simply false consciousness. For him, it is rather a term to describe a reality

"which is possible only on a condition that the individuals partaking in it are *not* aware of its proper logic; that is, a kind of reality *whose very ontological consistency implies a certain non-knowledge of its participants* – if we come to 'know too much', to pierce the true functioning of social reality, this reality would dissolve itself" (Žižek 2008, 15).

Žižek's definition of ideology might be extreme, and difficult to subscribe to. He can be said to belong to the discredited school of thinkers for whom ideology is almost everywhere and has essentially the character of false consciousness. Moreover, ANT is almost incompatible with most theories of ideology: if actors know what they do and why, there is little space for false consciousness. However, Žižek's writings on the liberal ideology do capture many of the essential paradoxes of my case: namely how certain principles like freedom of expression have a function which helps to maintain other unfreedoms. And this function can be named ideology – for lack of a better word. From an ANT perspective, we could simply define

ideology as a group of principles or ideas that have gained lots of support and alliances. In the debates around *The Bookseller of Kabul* people often thought that freedom of expression should be valued against other freedoms. As the spokespersons discussed above showed: freedom of expression was weighted against the right to privacy, and it gained more defenders than freedom of movement. Understood like this, the term ideology simply marks a cluster of ideas and beliefs, that have gained so much strength as actors that they can be applied and approved without more careful investigation into the nature of the process in which they are used.

Moreover, the wide questions Žižek poses over “knowing” or “not knowing” how reality works can be confronted on the micro-level where ANT operates. It is obvious that in the case of *The Bookseller of Kabul* all actors do not have all the relevant (whatever this means) information to make informed decisions. These unknown things find different forms. Most likely the book would not have been published, had the family known the content. Reviews might have been more critical, had the reviewers known better Seierstad’s methods. Not all actors (like designers or readers) knew that the family was dissatisfied with the book. Not everyone knew that the family had not seen the manuscript. Most readers do not know all the information I know. And even I have only a limited amount of information on certain aspects of the case: I do not know much about publisher’s decisions, lawyers cannot talk to me because of confidentiality, Seierstad’s agent does not reveal me the sales figures, and so on.

Following Žižek, if people were to “know too much” about how freedom of expression can or cannot be exercised, the freedom as an actor would lose part of its appeal. Hence, defining *The Bookseller of Kabul* (ideologically) as a case essentially about freedom of expression could obscure the fact that the case also involves another set of unfreedoms.

For those readers allergic to the concept of ideology, Judith Butler’s (2009) recent uses of the word “frame” might be useful here. As briefly discussed in interlude I, Butler discusses the frames of war as frames, which reproduce the norms inside which certain lives become more valued than others, or which “work to differentiate the lives we can apprehend from those we cannot” (Butler 2009, 3). Through her discussion on these frames she tries to understand why and how war “becomes easier, or more difficult, to wage” (Butler 2009, 2). One framing, which Butler discusses and which is of special importance in relation to Žižek’s views above, is the one that combines certain claims for liberal freedoms with anti-Muslim sentiments under the narratives of progress and modernity. Butler (2009, 105) mentions especially women’s sexual freedom and freedom of expression as instruments against Muslims. According to her, “certain version and deployment of the notion of ‘freedom’ can be used as an instrument of bigotry and coercion” (Butler 2009, 104–105). And certain “ideas concerning the progress of ‘freedom’ facilitate a political division between progressive sexual politics and struggles

against racism and religious discrimination” (Butler 2009, 104). These “certain” versions and ideas are those which see freedoms inside a narrative of progress, relying “upon a hegemonic [Western] culture, one that is called ‘modernity’” (Butler 2009, 109). This makes the domain of culture uncritically as a precondition for freedoms. Thus, Europe and the sphere of modernity are tried to be defined “as the privileged site where sexual radicalism can and does take place” (Butler 2009, 102). In other words, when Žižek (2002, 1–2) says that the ideology of liberal freedoms (like freedom of expression) masks another set of unfreedoms (like unfreedom to move), Butler refers to something similar by saying that the notion of freedom is deployed as an instrument of bigotry. She writes that her point is

“surely not to abandon freedom as a norm, but to ask about its uses, and to consider how it must be rethought if we are to resist its coercive instrumentalization in the present and if it is to take on another meaning that might remain useful for a radical democratic politics” (Butler 2009, 105).

As already mentioned in the previous interlude, the “[s]exually progressive conceptions of feminist rights or sexual freedoms have been mobilized not only to rationalize wars against predominantly Muslim populations, but also to argue for limits to immigration to Europe from predominantly Muslim countries.” (Butler 2009, 26.) This combination of wars and immigration policies under the name of defending modernity and freedoms makes Butler to call for a rearticulation of Leftist politics. It has to be done “in light of state violence, the exercise of war, and the heightening of ‘legal violence’ at the border” (Butler 2009, 27).

The Bookseller of Kabul takes place in the middle of these conjunctures, where the personal freedoms of both Seierstad and the family are exercised and promoted in the shadows of state violence. The book has been instrumentalized for the promotion of certain versions of freedoms, at the same time as it has once again shown how selective immigration policies against predominantly Muslim countries work. Intertwining sexual freedom and freedom of expression with progress or development, and using this discourse against the Afghan family was a frame used and reproduced by some of Seierstad’s supporters, as shown above.

However, Butler suggests that the frames, which guide our interpretation and what we see, think, and recognize, never *fully* determine what we see and apprehend. “Something exceeds the frame. A certain leakage makes frames more fallible than it might at first appear” (Butler 2009, 9). In tune with her theories of performativity, Butler (2009, 9) proposes that especially in the age of mechanical reproduction, the circulation of cultural products necessarily departs them from the contexts to which they have been limited. Butler writes of war photographs that circulate and thus create new contexts by virtue of their landing to new contexts. This leads us to understand “both the frame’s efficacy and its vulnerability to reversal, to subversion, even to critical instrumentalization. What is taken for granted in one instance becomes thematized

critically or even incredulously in another.”” (Butler 2009, 10). Butler writes that even though the movement of, for example, a photograph or poetry through contexts cannot “free anyone from prison, or stop a bomb or, indeed, reverse the course of the war, they nevertheless do provide the conditions for breaking out of the quotidian acceptance of war” (Butler 2009, 11).

The Bookseller of Kabul landed to new contexts each time it was republished, or commented on, and something similar to the process described by Butler started after the book had been translated into English. In this sense, the intervention of the family against *The Bookseller of Kabul* can be interpreted as an encouraging and important moment of breakage in the frame. It can also be interpreted in the context in which Bhabha has discussed the English book as being open for repetitions, which make the colonial text emerge uncertainly as difference (Bhabha 1985, 149–150). But how far did this subversive potential reach in the case of *The Bookseller of Kabul*? Above, I suggested that the court case did not particularly challenge these frames, but instead acknowledged the importance of the book as an element in the public discussion. Did the frames, perhaps, break on the level of the object?

4. FOLLOWING THE CHANGING OBJECT

My approach in the previous chapter was mainly inspired by ANT-literature. For the most part, it concentrated on alliances that were formed around, in support of, and against *The Bookseller of Kabul* in Norway. In doing so, it analysed and described mainly human testimonies on the book, both private and public. This emphasis on human communication might sound strange – taken the background of ANT in acknowledging the importance of non-human actors. However, it is not so rare that in the final instance actor-network research often ends up concentrating on the verbal accounts human beings give for their behaviour, and in many ways this is also what happened in chapter three.¹¹⁴ As the interludes and my critical comments vis-a-vis ANT in chapters two and three have suggested, when concentrating on actualities and testimonies of the actors, the ANT approach sometimes falls short when trying to explain the possible role of invisible, hidden, and non-articulated reasons for the behaviour of the actors. Furthermore, because ANT encourages the researcher to dig deep into the subject matter, it is often doomed to restrict its scope to very limited areas. Describing, for example, global actor-networks easily becomes very laborious, and thus unfeasible if not impossible.

To overcome some of these shortcomings, this chapter listens to the object, and turns the focus to the globally circulating book. It rests more clearly on Appadurai's (1986) methodological framework than the previous chapter, when it follows the trajectories of the object in order to analyse and draw conclusions on human evaluations. It investigates the *social life* of the book by concentrating on the material object. It enters multiple sites in the spirit of Marcus' (1995 & 2006) multisite ethnography and follows the conjunctures between the object and other actors.

These two chapters explain one another, because the object changes when alliances change, alliances change when the object changes, and in the final instance, as ANT would imply, the object itself is part of the alliances.

Both Appadurai and Latour stress the importance of transformations. For Latour (2005, 159), a social tie is "traceable only when it's being modified". Changes in a book interact with its reception – but they also interact, for example, with economic interests, and the interests of the publisher and the author. The dominant forces behind different changes can be found by following the different actors, and their processes of alliance building, for example, with readers' wishes, economic interests or political discourses. For Appadurai (1986), on the other hand, it is exactly transformations and different phases in the life cycle of a thing, which reveal human evaluations (see also Kopytoff 1986). Lash and Lury (2007) ground the need for this

¹¹⁴ For examples, see e.g. Latour 1993b & 1996b.

kind of analysis in the historical developments in culture industry. They argue that in the global culture industry, products "no longer circulate as identical objects, already fixed, static and discrete, determined by the intentions of their producers. Instead, cultural entities spin out of the control of their makers" (Lash & Lury 2007, 4–5). In the following, I will describe the transformations of *The Bookseller of Kabul* (as an object), and give provisional answers to the question: which were the forces and human evaluations that generated different changes? Hence, this chapter elaborates on the argument of Lash and Lury by demonstrating how the book transformed – and to which directions. But at the same time, my chapter also identifies those moments when the book stayed under the control of its makers – thus, showing the limits of transformations.

Consequently, the tension between fixity and transformations in literature is an interest underlying this chapter. As discussed in chapters one and two, historically the passage from circulating manuscripts to circulating prints (through the invention of printing) has become to mean a passage towards an increased amount of fixity. This characteristic could be taken back to the inner logics of the so-called print *culture* (of which Eisenstein 1979 writes more as a result of technological developments and Johns 1998 more as a social practice). Inside print culture, texts are not supposed to change: if we read *The Bookseller of Kabul* in Japanese, we should be able to trust that the content is the same as it was in Norway (excluding the transformations that come along with translation). This is one characteristic of mechanical reproduction. We tend to think that the bookseller should not turn for example into a butcher, or a shoemaker, when the book is translated. At the same time, however, mechanical reproduction can also "put the copy of the original into situations which would be out of reach for the original itself" (Benjamin 2005), but still the different copies are supposed to be identical to one another.

Digital (re)production, or dissemination, could in principle change the situation drastically, as digital modifications are inexpensive and easy to make. The scholarly literature on digitalization has often concentrated on the possibilities for unstable texts to foster free proliferation of messages and meanings. The vast literature on hypertexts and cybertexts – and hypertext literature or electronic literature (see e.g. Aarseth 1997, Bolter 1991, Hayles 2008, Siemens & Schreibman 2008) – shows interest in the instability of texts in the digital era. However, while concentrating on technology and potentialities, this literature has often not been particularly interested in the social, historical, economic, and juridical aspects which ward of the free proliferation of meanings or transformations of a text. When writing about the developments that took place after the invention of printing, instead of concentrating on technology, Johns (1998) has put focus on the relatively stable practices that create transformations or maintain fixity. This means that fixity itself is understood as a practice,

which needs to be socially maintained. Fixity exists inasmuch as it is recognized and acted upon by people (Johns 1998, 19). Today these practices, which prevent texts from changing, include for example the notion of authorship (Foucault 1981, 1991), regimes of copyrights (Jenkins 2008, Coombe 1998), and contingent but rather stable reading habits.¹¹⁵ While being new, digital literature is also a practice, which carries many of the conventions of print culture.

Thus, the question remains: to what extent did *The Bookseller of Kabul* stay the same globally, to what extent did it change, and what do these changes reveal of the possibilities of the book to produce consequences? Even if print culture (and its power) rests on the idea of stability, some elements have always been allowed to change. No one assumes that the covers would stay the same between editions, and it is relatively normal that new forewords or epilogues are added. Most of these elements that may easily change, can be called *paratexts*. In chapter two, paratexts were introduced as elements, which help us interpret the functions of a particular book. As Lori Ween (2003, 91) says, paratexts “shape, redefine, and sell a work for the larger reading audience and provide important clues about how the text functions in its reading communities as a cultural commodity”. If we supplement this with Appadurai’s thinking, it is especially the *changes* in the paratexts that provide the best clues. Consequently, these changes are at the heart of this chapter.

4.1 METHOD AND DATA GATHERING

The material for this chapter has been gathered by following the object. The book has travelled to different libraries, educational syllabi and reading lists.¹¹⁶ It has been sold in big chains, like Walmart (AP 01.11.03), in numerous local bookshops, and online. It has created epitexts in different national media, and online, as well as been recommended for and used by informal reading groups – and so on and so forth.¹¹⁷ The number of the disseminating copies, and the number of global epitexts on them, exceed the abilities of one researcher to give a full description of where the book went and when. Thus, I have had to concentrate on some trajectories and transformations, while leaving others with less attention. The core data of this chapter includes information on the different editions of *The Bookseller of Kabul*, certain

¹¹⁵ At the turn of the naughties, we have also heard non-scholarly comments on the need to control the internet, most of which are commercially motivated reactions against the play of hypertextuality.

¹¹⁶ See e.g. Carlmont High School 2010; Lehigh University 2005; University of Cambridge 2010.

¹¹⁷ See e.g. National Reading Group Month 2010; Library Book Club 2010.

online discussions and commentaries on it, and data I have collected by interviewing, via email, mainly cover designers and some readers of the book.

I have owned four editions of the book myself (a UK paperback, a US paperback, as well as a Finnish hard cover and a paperback), and I have held a copy of 32 different editions – from 23 different countries or language regions – in my hands.¹¹⁸ Seven of these were hard cover editions without dust jackets, but the remaining 25 editions contained all the same information the first buyer of the book has. These editions were stored in the National Library of Norway in Oslo, which I visited during my stay in the city. In the library, I took notes and photographed the covers. In these editions, I was interested in questions such as: what appeared on the covers, who had designed the covers and who had translated the text, when had the edition been released, and how many reprints had been taken, had the translation been funded by some institution etc? In other words, I was interested in peritexts – in those paratexts that are physically part of the book. The main peritexts in this chapter include covers, forewords, and what I call *extras* (texts that are later added to the book, usually by the publisher). The changes in peritexts usually happen under certain conventions: if the foreword is changed, this is mentioned; the cover designs and pictures are signed by someone etc. – in other words the reader knows who made the changes.¹¹⁹ These conventions are shared by different audiences. Hence, the interesting question does not lie in the simple fact that *The Bookseller of Kabul* has changed: what is interesting is towards which directions it has changed and when, or how these changes are controlled.

When the transformations in the objects pointed toward certain epitexts, I traced these links. This was the case for example with blurbs – those short pieces of text, usually citations from a well know source, that publishers often attach to books and especially to their covers or jackets. They are peritext as far as they appear in the book, but they often derive from media epitexts. Thus, my data in this chapter reflects the discussion started in the previous chapter on the convergence between the book and other forms of media.

¹¹⁸ These were: Norwegian (2 different), Swedish (3 different), Brazilian, Lithuanian, Danish (3 different), Hungarian, Russian, US, UK (2 different), German (2 different), French (2 different), Estonian, Czech, Latvian, Dutch, Spanish, Greek, Polish, Icelandic, Italian, Catalan, Georgian, and Finnish (2 different).

¹¹⁹ This general remark does not mean that there are no exceptions. For example, postmodern literature often played with these conventions, and literature published under strict censorship may often hide the actors behind texts. And lastly, especially the new interest in commons or general intellect have led to publishing which happens under the name of anonymised collectives.

These 32 editions and their peritexts, however, constitute only part of my data. With the help of Worldcat and Google's image search¹²⁰ I have supplemented my original picture collection, which has taken the number of the front covers in my collection to 69.¹²¹ The data for back covers consists of those 25 editions I analysed in the Norwegian national library, as well as of five back covers I have found online – in other words altogether 30 back covers. As already mentioned in chapter two, this method for collecting the visual data unfortunately means that the technical quality of some images may be rather poor. My conviction, however, is that also images of poor quality are worth including in the research, when the alternative is to exclude them altogether. Small images – and detailed information – of the covers can be found in appendix 6. The covers are numbered and named: in the text I refer to the specific covers in the following form: cover_001, cover_002 etc. To those figures of covers, which I have attached to the text body, I refer in the following form: Figure 1, Figure 2 etc.

After collecting the data, I contacted by e-mail all those cover designers I had been able to identify, and had found contact details for. Those designers who replied to my first e-mail received an e-mail questionnaire, which included up to twelve questions. (The questions were mainly the same for each designer, but some were customized if I wanted to receive more detailed answers to questions regarding the specific cover. A model questionnaire is in appendix 3.) I contacted altogether fifteen designers, out of which eight answered my questionnaire. I also contacted some translators by e-mail, but I did not find the information they gave very useful. In other words, I have also collected data I have not used in any particular way, but it might have influenced my interpretation explicitly.

Moreover, I have followed some epitexts the book created online. I followed *The Bookseller of Kabul* to three different social networking sites for literature: shelfari.com, goodreads.com, and librarything.com. These free sites offer forums, for mainly those who know English, to share their views on books, as well as to discuss, review, and tag them.¹²² In October 2009 (10.10.2009), when I collected my data, altogether 9 850 users of these forums had marked *The Bookseller of Kabul* as a book they had read. Out of these 9 850 users, 1 121 had reviewed the book. The length of the reviews ranged from one word to several pages, and are thus

¹²⁰ See www.worldcat.com & www.google.com/imghp

¹²¹ The only countries or language regions out of which I have not found any covers are Bangladesh/Bengali, Macedonian, Albania, and Ukraine. All other 37 translations/national editions appear at least once in my collection.

¹²² In October 2009, Shelfari was owned by Amazon, and Librarything was partly owned by Amazon. According to the web analytics tool Compete.com, Goodreads received 1 374 652 unique visits per month in October 2009, whereas Librarything received 1 105 695, and Shelfari 360 587 visits.

difficult to compare. Most of the reviews were in English. Only librarything.com included nine reviews written in a language other than English. It is essential to note that I have not done any comprehensive discourse analysis on these reviews. When they come up in my analysis, I use them more as anecdotes, which may explain further, deepen, or reflect from another angle the information other forms of data reveal. I would be happy to see these kind of networking tools to be used more extensively in reception studies, because they offer information on how readers articulate publicly their reading experiences, and how they collectively “make” a book by associating it with different discourses, debates, and other books. Of course the perspective of these sites is limited to mostly American book lovers, who are accustomed to using the internet, but nevertheless they do open up possibilities for empirical research on reader reception. The role of these kind of online communities in constructing a certain understanding or interpretation of a book would be an interesting question to theorize further. After the invention of printing technology, reading has been perceived mainly as a solitary pursuit compared to the oral literary culture that existed before printing. Against this background, the practice of sharing one’s views on books online might constitute an interesting phenomenon – even though the previous role of media, literary salons, and reading groups, in making the written word social, should not be underestimated.

In addition to the data collected from these three networking sites, I also did a small qualitative research among a group of Facebook-users, who had reviewed the book in the Livingsocial application on Facebook. Facebook gives access to Livingsocial-network, which is described as a social discovery and cataloging network.¹²³ It works similarly to the sites described above, allowing users to review and catalogue the books they have read, and to share this information with other users. Out of the 729 users who had reviewed *The Bookseller of Kabul* at Facebook (by 01.04.2009), I randomly chose 30 people to whom I sent (via Facebook’s message function) in April 2009, in English, a request to answer my questionnaire on their reading experience. Altogether fifteen people answered my questionnaire. (The first message, and the questionnaire is in appendix 4, whereas the references to the anonymous informants with their gender and nationality – as they described them – can be found in the bibliography.) Among other things, my interest was in finding out how readers had come across the book, where they had bought it, and which actors (critics, book clubs, retailers etc.) had contributed to their reading experience. Similarly to the data collected on the networking sites, also this data is of course biased, or at least very narrow in its perspective. It covers only a tiny share of those 729 users who had reviewed the book on the Livingsocial-site. One should also not forget, that the

¹²³ See books.livingsocial.com

729 users, out of which my data grows, constituted a very peculiar group among the readers of *The Bookseller of Kabul*. Already these fifteen Q&A forms, however, reveal how varying the reading experiences can be even among mostly US Facebook-users. As with the data gained from the networking sites, also these answers will be used only as projection screens for information gained elsewhere. Consequently, the reader has to keep in mind that these anecdotes should be proportioned to the wider global readership of *The Bookseller of Kabul*.

Subsequently, discussing how different readers have interpreted or understood *The Bookseller of Kabul* is beyond the scope of this research, even if the data online would offer interesting material for this kind of analysis. My interests lie more in approaching readers as consumers and users of particular books, than as hermeneutists or interpreters. The hardest part of following a thing is to know how to limit and define the data used in the research. Engaging seriously with readers' understanding of a particular book would require a thorough discussion on the complex debates on how to theorize, conceptualize and use readers in research (see e.g. Bennett 1995, 2). Partly to avoid this, the space which I have reserved for readers in this research is rather suggestive than assertive. By referring to them in passing, I want to exemplify how vast the scope of literary research can be and how following a thing may lead to areas which raise more questions than provide answers. More thematically, the mainly online-based approach to readers should remind us how readers increasingly construct (also collectively) books through their actions online.

One perspective can be said to be missing from this chapter, that of the different global publishers. This was not because the publishers or their employees (like editors) would not have played an interesting role in the social life of *The Bookseller of Kabul*. On the contrary, for example many cover designers referred to the publisher, or the editor, as those who made the important decisions, which changed the object. But gathering information about them was easier said than done. I approached eighteen publishers by an email sent to their corporate email addresses (on 15.02.10). This was supposed to be the first round of emails sent to those whose addresses were easy to find through Google's search engine. For these eighteen mails, I received only two answers. Out of this I made the conclusion that the data would most likely not be comprehensive enough for my purposes, and would take too much of an effort to gather. Because of this passiveness I faced from the side of the publishers, I assumed the interaction with them would not be satisfying enough for my purposes: the answers would most likely have been hasty and cursory. Hence, I decided to exclude explicit references to publishers' understanding of the object. However, the general patterns of publishing described in chapter two can help to explain, why certain changes took place in the object and its trajectories – even if they do not determine or guarantee these changes. The discussion in chapter two hopefully

compensates at least a bit for the lack of information I have on the particular editing and publishing processes of *The Bookseller of Kabul*.

Most of the data used in this chapter was collected between February 2009 and March 2010. I supplemented the data whenever I came across a blind spot in my collection. My own skills are of course limited: even if I have tried, I have not been able to cover all the different editions of the book in 41 different regions and in paperback, hardback, e-book and audiobook formats. I do not know all the languages, and I do not own all the editions. I have not had the possibility to make a word-to-word comparison between all the editions. Neither would it have been feasible to read the book in dozens of versions only to find differences that were not supposed to be there. Similarly, as mentioned above, the material available online has been so vast that I have been able to cover only a small fragment of it.

The very unwanted consequence of my personal limitations is that my research deals more with European and American editions and their epitexts than it does with other editions – as I am more familiar with those languages, and as material on them is more accessible in the internet. In addition to my knowledge in English, I have used my language skills in French, German, Spanish, Finnish, and Nordic languages (Swedish, Norwegian, Danish). However, to overcome some of the problems regarding my role as a London and Finland-based PhD student, I have found people to translate and help me with those editions less familiar for me. In the end, I have also used Googletranslate when trying to find or interpret the different editions.¹²⁴ This means I cannot, and will not, make careful linguistic analysis of these pieces of texts, but making rough translations has, for example, enabled me to find the different covers, map the themes discussed, and check titles and subtitles.

4.2 THE GLOBALLY CIRCULATING AND CHANGING OBJECT

Above I have given some provisional information on the global routes of *The Bookseller of Kabul*. In the following, I will describe its trajectories further.

According to the document received from Seierstad's agent, and to the information I have gathered online, the book was published in three countries in 2002 (Høier 28.01.10). In 2003, it was launched in ten different countries, and in 2004 in three new countries. Along with the year 2003, also 2005 seemed to be a particularly successful year as the book was published in

¹²⁴ See translate.google.com

ten countries. In 2006, it was launched in six places, and in year 2007 in three. In 2009, it was released in one country, and for the remaining five translations I have not been able to found the publication year (perhaps they have not been released yet). (See chart 2.)

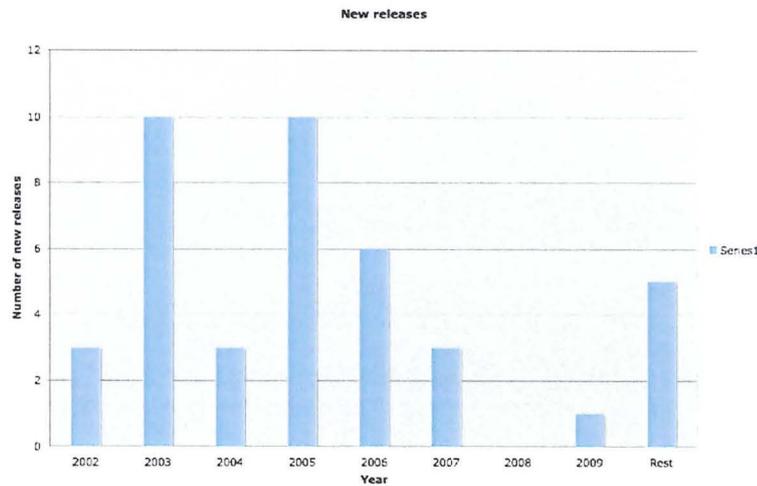


Chart 2: The number of new international releases of *The Bookseller of Kabul* between 2002–2009.

Chart 2 shows that the number of new releases has fluctuated throughout the years, but also that the career of the book has lasted for several years. The book has found new markets and material forms year after year. The two peaking years can be interpreted as the year after its release (2003), and as the year after it had been released in the USA (2005). The year between these two years, 2004, was surprisingly unsuccessful. It is possible that the controversy did have an effect on its career, so that new publisher were reluctant to publish it, or the author and her agent were reluctant to sell it.

Describing the sales figures is already a harder task. According to Seierstad’s agent, the figures are first of all confidential, and secondly even she does not know them internationally (Høier 28.01.10). However, according to the agent, by February 2010, it had, sold “definitely more” than 2 000 000 copies worldwide (Høier 01.02.10). This meant, for example, that it had sold some 250 000 copies in Norway when the court hearings took place in June 2010, and in the UK the book hit 500 000 sold copies in July 2010.¹²⁵

When the book travelled to different countries, it often transformed during these processes. In many countries, the book was published by several publishers, which usually belonged to the

¹²⁵ The Norwegian figure was presented by Cappelen Damm’s representative in the court on 15.06.2010. For the UK figure, see Høier 2010.

same media house, or were partly owned by the same company. Often, one of these was a publisher dedicated to paperbacks. For example in the UK, the book was first published as a hardcover version in August 2003 by Little Brown (Seierstad 2003a), and in March 2004 as a paperback by Virago Press (Seierstad 2004a), which is owned by Little Brown and publishes books only by women. In Finland, the book was first published by the country's biggest publisher WSOY in August 2003 (Seierstad 2003b), and later in October 2004 as a paperback by Loisto publishing (Seierstad 2004d), which was a publisher only for paperbacks and owned together by four of the biggest publishers in the country (including its original publisher WSOY). In some places, like in Czech Republic and Poland, the book was published as part of a series, which also determined some of the choices around paratexts (Didunyk 15.02.10, Ponagajbo 12.03.10). By the end of the first decade of its existence, also audio formats and digital formats of *The Bookseller of Kabul* started to appear at least in Norwegian and English (Seierstad 2007a, 2008 & 2010). This multiplication of formats can be read as one more sign of the book's success: the audience was large enough to make use of different formats. Sometimes the peritexts were changed during these processes, at other times not. In any case, these transformations in the formats brought new actors in contact with the book, and this way its career was determined by new actors each time it was republished.

In the following subchapters, I describe the transformation in the object during its first eight years. I start with the so-called authorial changes in the book and in its paratexts – or with those that presumably derive from the hands of the author. These include the changes in the literary text and in the foreword. After that I will discuss the so-called editorial paratexts and the ways in which these transformed. These include especially the changes in the covers. At the end of the chapter, I discuss a reading group guide, which can be identified as a paratext at the cross road of authorial and editorial changes.

4.3 THE CHANGING LITERARY TEXT

In August 2003, only a day after the controversy was made public, *VG* reported that Seierstad had modified the text of *The Bookseller of Kabul* for the English editions. According to the paper, she had removed from the first English edition passages which described how Shah Muhammed Rais' teenaged son dreamed of girls and discussed pornography with his friend. Moreover, the paper reported that for the subsequent English edition, which was due to be

published in the USA in October, she had made further changes under the pressure of Rais.¹²⁶ (VG 29.08.03b.)

The news about these modifications spread far. In October the same year, a Finnish newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat* reported that three things had been removed from the English translation of *The Bookseller of Kabul* (HS 18.10.03). (1) A section describing women in the bath (hammam) when they do not have burqas. (2) Another section describing how a local [Afghan] sexual intercourse is looked at through a keyhole. And (3) a section where brothers commit an honour killing and kill their sister.¹ A few weeks later *The Guardian* (03.11.03) published an article about the controversy and mentioned that Rais is “far from placated” although “the author has removed offending passages from reprints”.

These newspapers gave the impression that the book had been modified according to the wishes of the family. I asked Seierstad’s agent by email in September 2010 to specify the removals, but she did not reply to my message.¹²⁷ Neither were these removals specified in the court – even if the defence used them as an argument in their favour. However, on the basis of my own readings of both the original Norwegian text and the modified translations, the changes are not significant (compare the Norwegian first edition, Seierstad 2002, and for example the US paperback edition, Seierstad 2004c). Only few sentences have been removed, and most of the controversial passages mentioned in the Finnish newspaper still appear in some form. Against the information spread in the newspaper, the honour killing, and naked female bodies are described also in the later English translations. Two sentences describing the naked grandmother of the family, her breasts and the size of her belly have been replaced, but references to her breasts and belly are also in the modified text, and the bodies of younger women and family members are still described carefully.¹²⁸ The readers of the English paperback, published by Virago Press in 2004, learn for example this:

“The nineteen-year-old [Leila] has a childlike body, in between girl and woman. The whole Khan family are on the plump side, certainly compared to Afghan standards. The fat and the cooking oil they pour over their food are manifested on their bodies. --
- Leila’s skin is pale and immaculate, soft as a baby’s bottom. The facial colour changes between white, yellow and pale grey.” (Seierstad 2004a, 163.)

¹²⁶ It is noteworthy that the paper did not mention these removals the day before, when it reported on the controversy. Furthermore, the passage implies that Rais and Seierstad had been discussing the case to the extent that Seierstad said she had modified the text because Rais had pressured her.

¹²⁷ I sent the email on 02.09.2010.

¹²⁸ For the original sentences, see Seierstad 2002, 166–170.

Even after the removals, a chapter called “The Smell of Dust” is still constructed around describing naked women in hammam. In the UK edition, this chapter includes 16 pages (Seierstad 2004a, 161–177). In many ways, it follows the tendency described by Yegenoglu (1998) and summarized in the interlude I: namely that the orientalist discourse has rested on the trope of making female bodies visible.

The honour killing is also described in the modified editions. The UK paperback from 2004 describes it in the following way: “She, the mother, it was, who in the end dispatched her three sons to kill her daughter. The brothers entered the room together. Together they put a pillow over her face; together they pushed it down, harder, harder, until life was extinguished.” (Seierstad 2004a, 43.) This passage is exactly the same as in the original Norwegian version. Here it is also noteworthy how the Finnish newspaper bypassed the role of the mother in the killing, when it reported that the brothers were the killers. Also this can be read in the wider context of the Western tendency to emphasise male oppression against female.

Regarding the third removed passage, the one referring to sexual intercourse: one and a half sentences have been removed between the original Norwegian and the modified international editions. This means altogether 31 words.¹²⁹

In other words, the reported removals certainly did not change the text very much – and even these removals have not been systematically carried out: the German paperback edition from 2004 still includes the original sentences of the hammam scene (Seierstad 2004b). It is important to recognize how different media actors digested the message that the manuscript had gone through major changes – even if they ended up being very small. Most likely the source of this message was the author, her literary agent, or the publisher – those who were both responsible for the dissemination of the book and who could have stopped it from circulating. *The Guardian* (03.11.03) based its aforementioned article on an interview with the author, whereas the Finnish newspaper belongs to the same conglomerate than Seierstad’s Finnish publisher (WSOY).

Also in the trial, which I followed, the removals were discussed without specific information of what exactly had been removed. The author testified that the book had been modified, and the judge asked about the size of the non-modified editions, but she did not ask what the changes were. Nobody truly seemed to care what the modifications were.

¹²⁹ For the original sentences, see Seierstad 2002, 64.

4.4 CHANGES IN PARATEXTS

The literary text, in other words, went through only small modifications, which found internationally far-spreading alliances in some newspapers.¹³⁰ But this does not mean the book did not change significantly during the years. In the following I will discuss the changes in the peritexts – as they appear both under author’s and under publisher’s control. I start with the foreword, because that brings together the peritexts and the authorial changes. The authorial changes in a book, and in its peritexts, namely share a theoretically interesting dimension, which was already referred to in chapter two. As Marie Maclean (1991) has suggested, paratexts may “open a new consideration of authorial and indeed editorial and prefatorial ‘intention’”. Research on paratexts might direct us to such places “where the author displays intentions, where he or she speaks to the reader as sender to receiver” (ibid.).¹³¹

Peritexts – especially authorial peritexts – are often directly addressed to the audience. As Maclean (1991, 274) writes, the

“paratext involves a series of first order illocutionary acts in which the author, the editor, or the prefacer are frequently using direct performatives. They are informing, persuading, advising, or indeed exhorting and commanding the reader. On the other hand the world of the fictional text is one of second order speech acts where even the most personal of narrators belongs not to the real world but to the represented world”.¹³²

Even if the non-paratextual text in *The Bookseller of Kabul* cannot be defined as fictional (at least not without reservations), this difference between the worlds can be maintained especially because the author has effaced her presence from the non-paratextual text, but not from the foreword and the epilogue. Thus, the foreword and its changes constitute a sphere where the authorial intentions are more visibly present than elsewhere in the book.

Foreword

The original foreword to *The Bookseller of Kabul* starts in the following way: “One of the first people I met when I arrived in Kabul in November 2001 was Sultan Khan” (Seierstad 2004a, 1). It continues by explaining their encounter, Seierstad’s move into the house, and their daily

¹³⁰ This development can be compared to Rais’ aforementioned suggestion that he might modify the text himself, something which Seierstad disapproved.

¹³¹ Maclean does not make distinctions between peritexts and epitexts. My interest in this chapter is, however, primarily in peritexts, and in my opinion Maclean’s point applies best to peritexts (even though some epitexts, like interviews with the author, have a lot in common with peritexts). Hence, the weaving between the words paratexts and peritexts in this subchapter.

¹³² As mentioned, these concepts derive from speech act theory (Maclean 1991, 274).

routines, thus, contextualizing and attaching the text to the lived experience of the author. It also offers the reader advice on how to approach the text, for example by connecting the text to Seierstad's observations the following way: "I have written down what I saw and heard, and have tried to gather impressions of a Kabul spring" (Seierstad 2004a, 8). This sentence can be read as an advice to read the book as a truthful account, but at the same time as a collection of impressions. This mixture of pure facts and more impressionist narrative is present also in the following sentence where the words literary and real merge: "I have written this book in literary form, but it is based on real events" (Seierstad 2004a, 3.) The reader is asked to believe that the book encloses truth, but she is also asked to allow the author some artistic freedoms. This ambiguity was discussed also in the introduction as a source of generic confusion.

The original foreword was modified, and some paragraphs were added to it, at some point during the first autumn or winter after the book's release. The new sequences concentrate mainly on language and translation issues, as well as on the method through which the author received her stories. The new paragraphs are the following:

"Readers have asked me, 'How do you know what goes on inside the heads of the various family members?' I am not, of course, an omniscient author. Internal dialogue and feelings are based entirely on what family members described to me.

I never mastered Dari, the Persian dialect spoken by the Khan family, but several family members spoke English. Unusual? Yes. But then my tale from Kabul is the tale of a most unusual Afghan family. A bookseller's family is unusual in a country where three-quarters of the population can neither read or write.

Sultan had picked up a colorful and verbose form of English while teaching a diplomat his own Dari dialect. His young sister Leila spoke excellent English, having attended Pakistani schools when she was a refugee, and evening classes in Afghanistan. Mansur, Sultan's eldest son, also spoke fluent English, after several years of schooling in Pakistan. He was able to tell me about his fears, loves, and his discussions with God. He described how he wanted to immerse himself in a religious cleansing process, and he allowed me to accompany him on the pilgrimage to Mazar, as an invisible fourth companion." (Seierstad 2004a, 4.)¹³³

Another added passage tells this:

"I heard about Sultan's proposal to Sonya from those involved in the story: Sultan, Sonya, his mother, sisters, brother and Sharifa.

Sultan didn't allow anyone else outside the family to live in his house, so he, Mansur, and Leila acted as my interpreters. This of course gave them a large influence over their

¹³³ Mansur is one of Sultan's sons, and Leila is Sultan's sister.

family story, but I double-checked the various versions and asked the same questions of all three interpreters, who between them represented the large contrasts within the family.” (Seierstad 2004a, 5.)

Both of these additions help the potential reader to understand a little better how the author received her stories – at least if s/he has decided to read the foreword, believes in what is said in it, and is familiar with different narrating techniques (and for example with the concept of omniscient author). They inform the reader about translation practices and language limitations.

These kind of paratexts, which inform, persuade and directly advise the readers can be read as attempts to control reader’s construction of the text, as Maclean writes in relation to book titles. She describes paratexts also as a means of lending the text authority. (Maclean 1991, 275.) Keeping these observations in mind, the modifications of the foreword, can be read as especially strong attempts to direct the reader. The added paragraphs persuade the reader to think that despite Seierstad’s lack of language skills and her limited experiences, the narrative can be trusted and conceived as an objective account.

Where did these changes come from? Did the intentions of the author change along the way, or why were the additions made? The first added paragraph makes an interesting reference to readers when saying that “readers have asked” Seierstad about her work. Who were these readers? Because the foreword was modified so soon after the launch, the criticism Seierstad received in the aftermath of Rais’ appearance in 2003 could not have been behind these changes. As discussed in chapter three, the public reviews were first and foremost positive during the first year. The problems of her method were discussed in the media first in the autumn 2003. In one of the interviews I made, however, my informant referred to a public event on the book, which took place in the autumn 2002 in a cultural restaurant Smuget in Oslo (Petersen 24.02.09). This event was also briefly mentioned in a radio program *Ordfront*, which was broadcast on 07.12.02. Apparently the event had been influential for those who were present, and according to my informant, in this event journalists and the audience asked Seierstad critical questions about her “fly-on-the-wall” perspective, and about how she received her story (Petersen 24.02.09). Also the radio program, which was broadcast soon after the event, discussed the generic ambiguities of the book. It is possible that this event – perhaps along with private epitexts or private discussions the author had with readers – influenced her decision to modify the foreword. In other words, the modifications of the foreword seem to imply that criticism existed during the first year already, but as discussed in chapter three, it was not really part of the public media debate.

The author and the object seemed to interact with the reception to a certain extent, but this interaction included a peculiar detail. What is noteworthy is that in most editions, which used

the new foreword, it was not re-dated. It was still dated as having been written on 1st of August 2002 – at the time of the first edition. In other words, the book that travelled around the world had changed, but it gave an illusion as if it had not. From the 32 different editions I have been able to have a close look at, only the Dutch edition mentions that the foreword has been modified on 6th of January 2003 (Seierstad 2005). Whether this lack of information was due to a mistake, or whether it was deliberate, or a mistake caused by ignorance, has little importance: the end result is that the readers cannot know the book has been modified.

For me, these changes (or the lack of certain changes) show how control over the message can be exercised over time without the reader receiving information about it. The modifications made the book stronger vis-à-vis the criticism it received, but the fact that these modifications were not reported, undermines the possibilities of criticism to proliferate.

The changing covers

The changes discussed above can be labelled as authorial changes. Now it is time to investigate those changes that were mainly initiated by other actors. In this respect, a significant platform were the book covers.

There is little independent academic research on book covers and cover images – especially in relation to reception – and one can say that no general theory for book covers exist. This is surprising taken the importance marketers give to the covers. As Agnus Phillips (2007, 19) writes, the “importance of the cover to a book’s sales is reflected in the growth of the approval process for new designs, which may take into account the opinions of key retailers as well as the views of the publisher’s editorial, sales, and marketing staff”. The relation between text and image has been a commonplace subject of research, and there is even a journal called *Word & Image*, but this research has often meant concentrating on the relationship between paintings and literature, between visuality and text (for example on ekphrasis),¹³⁴ or to such genres as comics or picture books (see e.g. Mikkonen 2005, Mitchell 1994, Robillard & Jongeneel 1998). When covers and cover images have been discussed, they have usually been theorized as paratexts (see e.g. Henseler 2006, Yampbell 2005, Pears 2007) – even if Genette did not analyse images in his book *Paratexts* (2001). This means that the original theory of paratexts was not well informed by the specific problems images may pose for the theory. And it has never been fully developed to suit the needs of cover analysis.

¹³⁴ In short, ekphrasis refers to a literary description of, or a commentary on, a visual work of art.

Even if covers have not been analysed as widely as one could imagine, there is an interesting recent exception, a collection of articles edited by Nicole Matthews and Nickianne Moody, titled *Judging a Book by Its Cover: Fans, Publishers, Designers, and the Marketing* (2007). In their introduction, the editors write that so far researchers have often “asked ‘What makes a great front cover’, picking out innovators in typography and graphic design”, thus leaving aside the question of how book covers influence their audiences (Matthews & Moody 2007, xvii). In this chapter, I share their interests in discussing “the role of covers in shaping the distribution, reception and use of books” (Matthews & Moody 2007, xvii). The editors also make explicit their interest in the materiality of contemporary popular books – thus, bringing the focus close to my interests. However, also in this collection, most authors refer to Genette and his concept of paratext, which demonstrates well the lack of specific conceptual tools for doing research on covers and cover images.

In this subchapter, I concentrate mainly on the question of what the covers of *The Bookseller of Kabul* depict, and which textual elements they include. In other words, I will not offer detailed semiotic, nor hermeneutic interpretations of the images. That is beyond the scope of this research and my skills. Consequently, I restrict my perspective mainly on the question of *what* the covers portray, rather than *how*. The covers of the book change drastically between editions, and the thematic changes (i.e. rough changes in *what* the covers depict and include) seem to offer already intriguing enough material for my purposes. Thus, I leave more comprehensive analysis of the images to others. I do not discuss all the 69 covers individually, or refer to all of them, but instead I present and discuss common patterns I have found among the covers in my collection. As mentioned, all the covers can be found in the appendix 6, if the reader wants to see where my conclusions derive from.

Even if changes happen in time, I have decided not to include a timeline of the covers. First of all, because it would be almost impossible. Books usually do not include exact release dates, only the year of each edition. Moreover, those covers I have found online, seldom included even this information. Secondly, a timeline would too easily give an illusion as if the transformations formed a coherent chronology or development with a starting point and an end. This is, however, not the case. Rather we face swarms or different clusters of covers. In some cases, the launch dates are significant, because some of the covers can be interpreted as direct reactions to particular events, but in general the transformations do not neatly subsequent each others, nor form a narrative of a single logic evolution.

Nevertheless, let’s start with the first cover (figure 5 below).

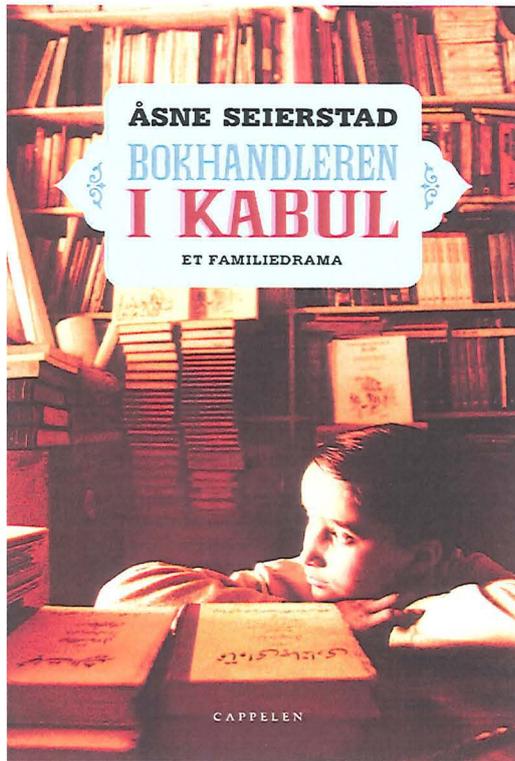


Figure 5. Cover_001. The first Norwegian edition.

The cover of the first (Norwegian) edition of *The Bookseller of Kabul* portrays a young boy sitting at a table, surrounded by books. Along with the picture, the cover includes the name of the author, a title, and a subtitle. As one of the most important thresholds, the title (*Bokhandleren i Kabul*, Engl. *The Bookseller of Kabul*) refers both to books and to an individual, thus creating connotations to two popular literary genres – to books that deal with books and to portraits. In its focus on the individual, the title is strikingly different from the preliminary title that was announced in February 2002 (*Vår i støv. Reiseskildring fra Afghanistan*, in English *Spring in Dust. A Travelogue from Afghanistan*). The final title offered the book to the readers as a portrait instead of a travelogue. The subtitle “Et familiedrama” (a family drama) strengthened this focus on individuals at the expense of the country. It can be taken as a reference, first of all to the genre, but secondly to a play written by the most important Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen, whose well known play *Gengangere* has a subtitle “et familiedrama i tre akter” (“Ghosts: A family drama in three acts”, also possible to translate as “The Revenants”).

This cover picture was appropriated by many translated editions (with small modifications – like changes in the typography). For example, a Finnish (figure 6 below), a Spanish (cover_005), and an Italian (cover_014) edition, all have the same picture on the cover.

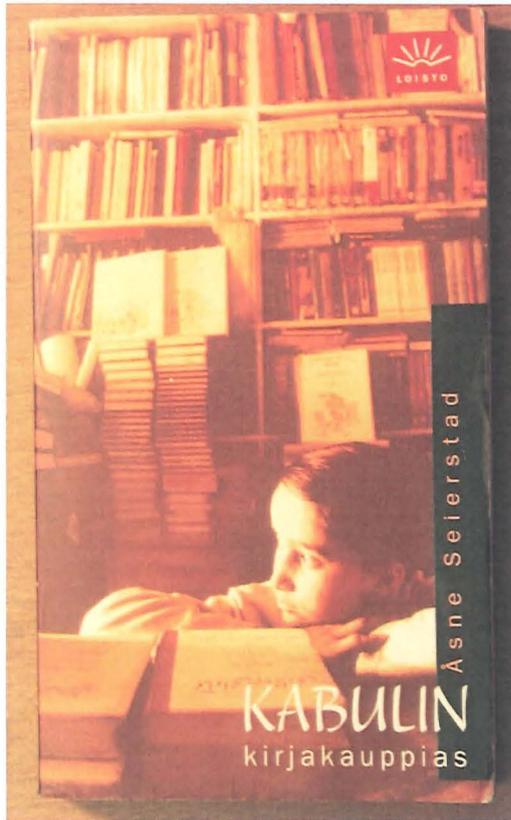


Figure 6. Cover_012. Finnish edition using the same image as the original Norwegian cover.

The Swedish translation, which was launched just two weeks after the Norwegian edition in September 2002, however, uses a different picture, portraying people in a window and a boy under the window (figure 7 below). This cover was designed simultaneously with the first Norwegian cover. In that sense, the book has two “original” covers, as they were both designed before the launch of the book – and according to the graphic designer, at least the Swedish cover was designed even before the text was ready (Acedo 12.10.09).

The same picture appears in many translated editions (for example a UK cover_018, a Serbian cover_015, and an Israeli cover_035). Some editions use part of the same picture (Dutch cover_022, Hindi cover_025, figures 8 and 9 below), or a picture from the same setting (Brazilian cover_027).

In some editions, the viewer can see only the boy in a slightly different position. For example the French (figure 10 below) and German (cover_030) editions portray the same young boy sitting in front of the wall.

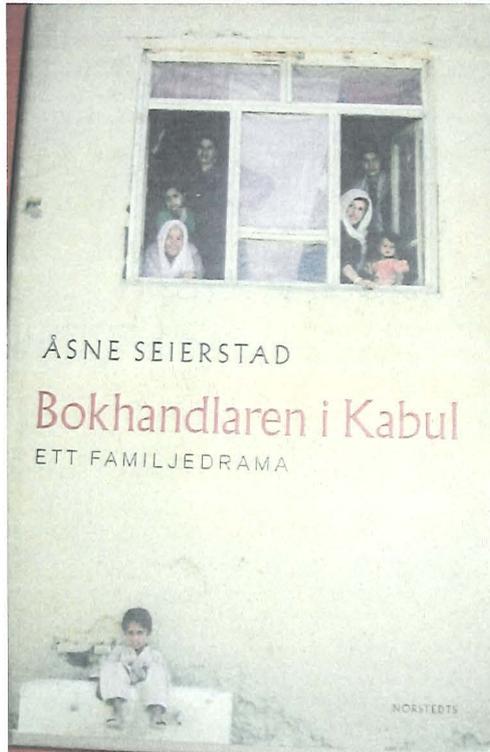


Figure 7. Cover_002. The first Swedish cover.

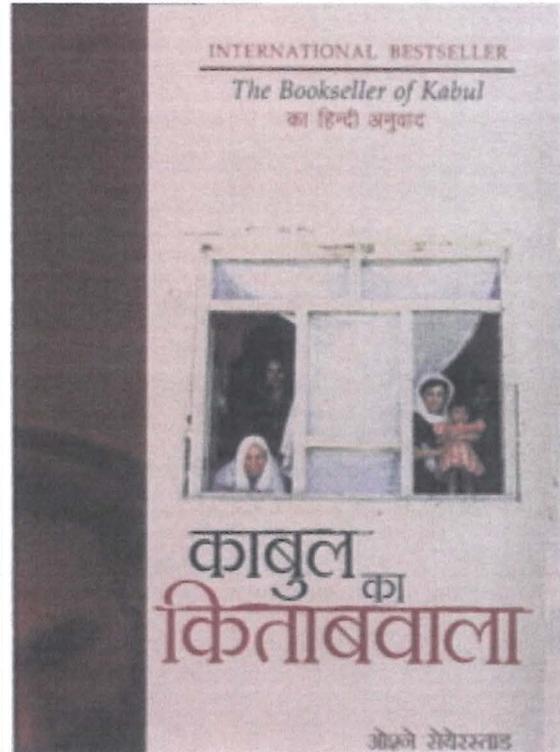


Figure 8. Cover_025. The cover of a Hindi edition, using part of the same photograph as the first Swedish cover.

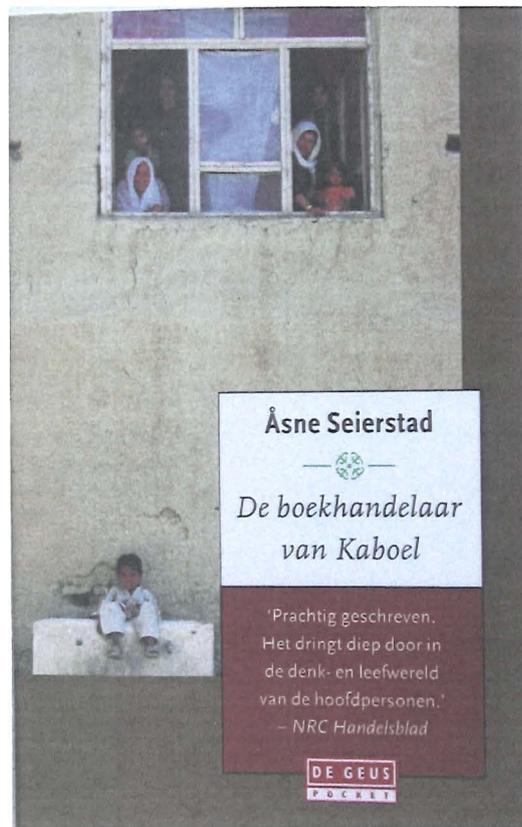


Figure 9. Cover_022. A Dutch cover with same photograph, but different cropping, as the first Swedish cover.

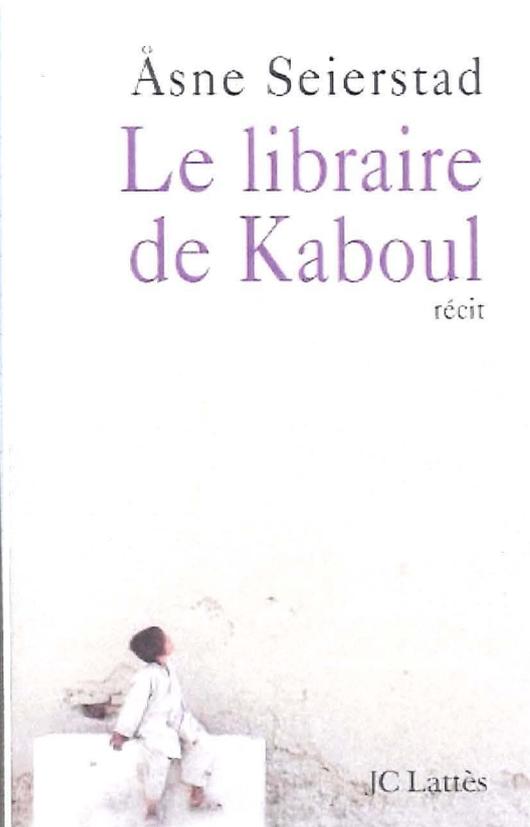


Figure 10. Cover_032. A French cover portraying the same young boy as the first Swedish cover.

These two “original” cover images (the people in the window and the boy with the books – and their modifications) portray the real Rais family (VG 17.09.2003). The Swedish designer of the cover had received the photograph (of the people in the window) from the publisher. In other words, it was not her own decision to use it, but she told that she would not have used recognizable persons were they not the ones represented in the book. (Acedo 12.10.09.) She did not find it problematic to portray the real family, rather the opposite, and there had been no discussions between the publisher and the designer for it potentially being problematic.¹³⁵ One should remember that at this point there was not yet any public criticism against the book. However, when the Brazilian cover was released in 2006 with the same picture as the first Swedish cover (cover_027), the family had already been in public for several years. The Brazilian designer said that of course he knew it portrayed the family, and that was the reason he used it, but he did not know about the criticism the family had expressed against the author (Iaccarino 16.03.10). The information about the criticism did not travel as extensively as one might have expected.

I concentrate carefully on these first covers because they work as a point of comparison for what happened afterwards. They stand for a certain raw state of the book, when its biography had not yet put a mark on the object and its paratextual (re)presentations. In Genette’s vocabulary, we could here talk about “original” paratexts against which the transformations took place. For Genette (2001, 5–6), the original paratexts are produced and published simultaneously with the literary texts – unlike prior paratexts, like pre-publicity, or later paratexts that appear first after the publication of the book. Because in this chapter, I follow Appadurai’s ideas on the social life of things, it is the transformations vis-à-vis the original paratexts that interest me the most.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that the “original text”, and the “original paratexts” surrounding it do not constitute a pure and untouched document, which would first later be “corrupted or changed by the publishing industry and marketing schemes” (Ween 2003, 91). As already mentioned, from my perspective the power of a paratext, or the effects it produces, are an effect of the network of actors around it, not an essence of the paratext or a consequence of the literary text. The functions of the paratexts are determined by those associations specific paratexts have with other actors. The literary text of the book is only one layer “of meaning that is influenced by the demands and desires of cultural norms”, as Ween (2003, 91) would

¹³⁵ Later this became one strong argument in the legal controversy. According to Seierstad, the photographs were taken in agreement with those portrayed, and a contract between Seierstad and the photographer Kate Brooks was signed (VG Nett 17.09.2003). This indicates that the contract does not include the family, only the two professionals.

say. Thus, as mentioned in chapter two, the changes in the paratexts do not always need to serve the rather static literary text, but they can also interact with other actors and other paratexts, sometimes also at the expense of the literary text. The paratexts might often be subordinated to the text, but already from the beginning on, the text can also be subordinated to other mechanisms – such as publishing, politics or media discussion. In the development of the covers of *The Bookseller of Kabul*, these hierarchies, however, change their nature, and over the course of time the paratexts start to build stronger links with elements outside the literary text – as will be shown in the latter part of this chapter.

By following the changes in the peritexts, we realize how the relations between different paratexts change in ways, which do not always find their explanations in the literary text. For example, the relations between the title of the book, its subtitle and the cover picture can change significantly even if the literary text does not change at all. We can see a productive set of relations emerging between different paratexts rather than between the literary text and the paratexts. This is the point an ANT-approach can help us to understand: relations are not straightforward, nor one-way processes, and thus the literary text should not be privileged a priori (at the expense of alliances around it, or of paratexts) when exploring the effects of a book.

In the first two covers of *The Bookseller of Kabul*, the different peritexts on the front cover were in a relative harmony with each other. The titles “The Bookseller of Kabul” (Bokhandleren I Kabul/Bokhandlaren I Kabul), and the subtitles “A Family drama” (Et familiedrama/Ett familjedrama) were in harmony with the two pictures, the other one portraying a boy with books (ref. the title), and the other one presenting a family in a window (ref. the subtitle). These relations, however, later transformed in significant ways.

In the following, I will describe these transformations in detail, but to give a short summary: after the first few editions of *The Bookseller of Kabul*, two different but intertwined transformations started to take place. They happen in time and space – and reflect similar tendencies – but they do not follow each other in any hierarchical fashion, nor form any straightforward evolution. (1) The first set of transformations takes away the emphasis on the family drama or bookselling and puts more focus on women. (2) And the second set of transformations includes practices that put emphasis on the author, on commentaries, and on the success of the book.

Women occupy the covers: A shared reading of Afghanistan

As mentioned already, many publishers used the picture of either the first Swedish or the first Norwegian cover. But many also changed the cover image altogether. A large majority of

those covers of *The Bookseller of Kabul* that did not portray the boy in the bookshop, nor the family in the window, portrayed a woman or women. Moreover, a large majority of these, portrayed a woman (or women) under a burqa, or some form of a veil. As mentioned, the total number of front covers I have analysed is 69, but the number of different cover *images* I have had access to is 31.¹³⁶ A simplified breakdown of these 31 different pictures is the following:

- 18 pictures portray only females¹³⁷ (covers_ 040, 043, 045, 046, 047, 048, 049, 050, 052, 056, 057, 058, 060, 061, 062, 063, 065, 066)
- 5 pictures portray both males and females (in one picture the people look like a family) (covers_002, 039, 051, 059, 064)
- 5 pictures portray only males (covers_001, 030, 038, 054, 068)
- 3 pictures do not portray people, or the gender is unrecognisable (covers_041, 042, 055)

In other words, the most obvious shift was from the two male, or family oriented original covers to a cluster of female dominated covers. Out of those 23 covers, which include women, a majority portray women in burqas, or veiled women. One image, portraying Seierstad herself (cover_040), does not include a veil, nor a burqa, and one image portrays a woman hiding her face with her hands (cover_046), but all the remaining 21 pictures have women wearing either a veil or a burqa. Few of these covers have anything to do with books, or bookselling, which was the theme of the first Norwegian edition and the theme the title emphasises. From the 31 different pictures, only four include books in a form or another.

In short, after the book started to gain international success, burqas have been widely used in the global editions, and books or families have almost disappeared from the covers (figures 11–14 below, as well as covers_039, 043, 044, 045, 052, 056, 057, 060, 061, 062, 063, 066, 065, 067).

¹³⁶ There are 31 different pictures in my data if we exclude the different, slightly modified versions of covers portraying the same image. For example, when only typography has changed, or when the same picture has been used in two countries, I have counted these only as one image.

¹³⁷ Persons under burqas are counted as female.



他的書，蘇聯人來了，蘇聯人來了，塔利班來了，塔利班來了，燒。
他的女人，平日只能穿藍色，結婚那天必須穿綠色。兩種顏色之間，是女人的希望與絕望。



Figure 11. Cover_049. Georgian cover portraying a burqa.
Figure 12. Cover_058. Chinese cover portraying a burqa.

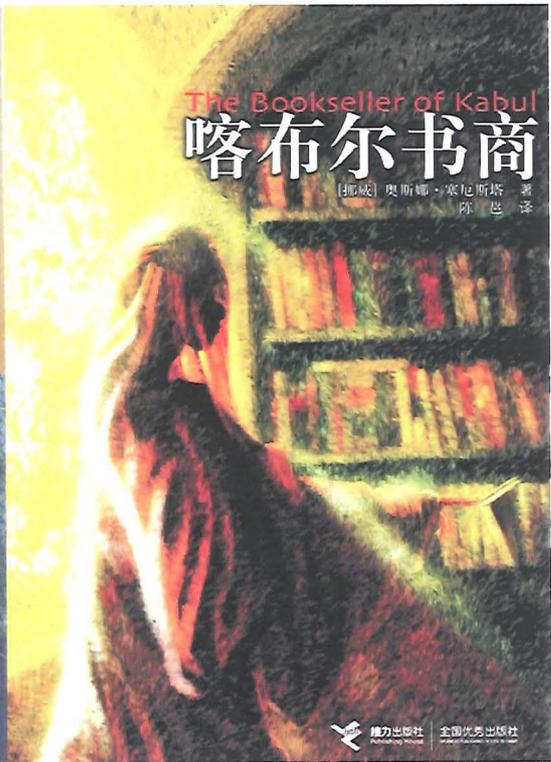
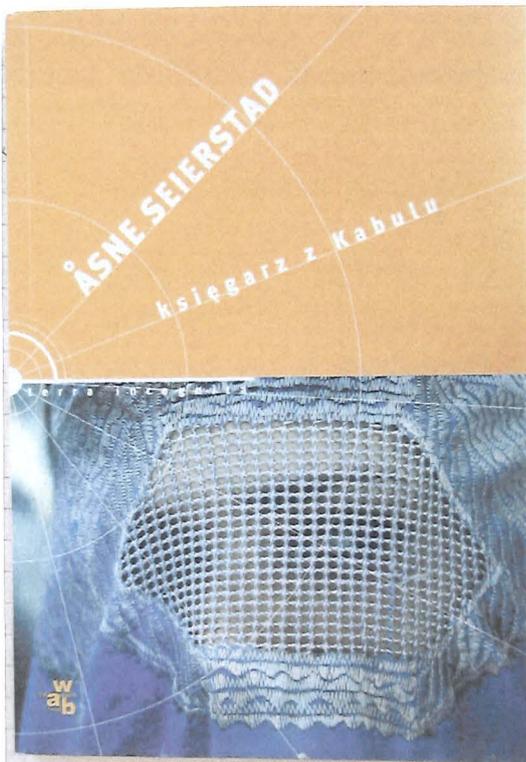


Figure 13. Cover_053. Polish cover portraying burqa.
Figure 14. Cover_063. Chinese cover portraying a form of veil (and also books).

Even if the titles of the editions still refer to bookselling and to the bookseller (a man) – as none of the international translations changed the title – the pictures point to veiling. These images have been reproduced even when the textual framing of the book has stayed in the realm of the bookseller (the man): for example a US paperback edition portrays two women in burqas and part of a man on the front cover, whereas the back cover presents the book as a “mesmerizing portrait of a proud man” (figures 15 & 16 below). Similar pattern is found in the Italian paperback, which portrays a woman in burqa on its front cover but refers mainly to “Sultan” in its back cover text (covers_065, 065b). What does this imply?

The designer of the US paperback cover (cover_039) explained me her choice of the burqa-picture in her email: “I wanted to emphasize how shrouded and unseen the women in Kabul were. I also was looking for an [sic] figure that included a man.” (Berger 02.10.09.) She continued:

“To me the image of the women seen only from the back with a man in the foreground facing towards the camera, summed up, in a quiet way, the gender issues that Asne [sic] Seierstad writes about. I liked that the door frame physically separated the women from the man. The colors seem also distinctly Afghani.” (Berger 02.10.09.)

Unlike many other designers, whom I interviewed, this designer had read the book, and looked “for images that the story evoked”. (Berger 02.10.09.) In that sense, with her cover she wanted to emphasise the message that – according to her interpretation – Seierstad was writing about: the unseen role of women in Kabul. This willingness to strengthen the voice of the women, which is in danger of being weaker than that of the men, guided the designer. For this designer, the threshold marked by femininity took over those stressing bookselling, or the family.

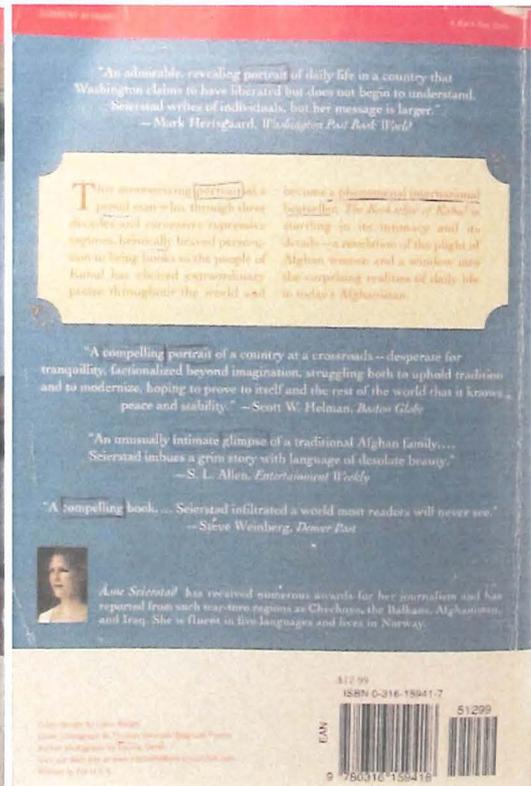
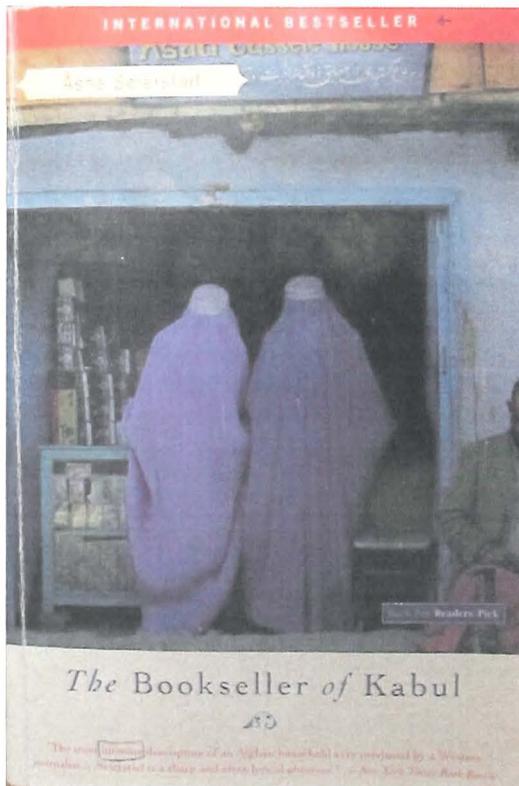


Figure 15. Cover_039. A US cover portraying burqas.
 Figure 16. Cover_039b. A US back cover.

Using such individual explanations the designers give for their work, is very much what ANT encourages to do. However, the fact that covers portraying women become a pattern, is worth analysing also inside Appadurai's framework of how the social life of things reveals human evaluations. Because a significant number of the covers portray veiled or burqa-clothed women, these transformations can be read as a sign of a globally shared understanding of the book. Or maybe it would be more to the point to say that this shared understanding concerns Afghanistan even more than the book, as not all the designers had read the book. Five out of the eight designers who answered my question said they had not read the whole book,¹³⁸ two did not answer that particular question (Pettersen 30.09.09, Kim 19.11.09), and only the US paperback designer confirmed reading it (Berger 02.10.09). The changes in the covers can obviously not be primarily subordinated to the literary text, if the designers have not read the text. The designers had often not seen other covers of the book either (Pettersen 30.09.09, Ponagajbo 12.03.10), or they had seen only one or two of them (Molin 30.09.09, Didunyk 15.02.10, Kim 19.11.09), but they still came to the same conclusion about the importance of the veiled woman as a figure. This reminds of Foucault (1980, 194–195) who wrote about the

¹³⁸ These were Ponagajbo (12.03.10), Didunyk (15.02.10), Iaccarino (16.03.10), Acedo (12.10.09), Molin (30.09.09).

apparatus as being something, which answers to an urgent need and, thus, overrides individual intentions. In this framework, power is both intentional and non-subjective. The logic of the apparatus is not reducible to the decisions of these individual designers, but still the power of the apparatus gets constructed in the works of these actors – not least because their space for action is limited.¹³⁹ The limitations can derive for example from the material available. Some designers, who used photographs, chose their pictures from the collections of international press agencies. This way the image of Afghanistan was also mediated and determined by these agencies. The Polish designer used Getty Images, based in Seattle (Ponagajbo 12.03.10, cover_053). And the US designers, for both the hard cover (cover_036) and the paper back covers (cover_039), used the service of Magnum Photos, which has its editorial agencies in New York, London, Paris and Tokyo (Berger 02.10.09, Kim 19.11.09).

What can be said of this apparatus and its interaction with the readers? According to Ween (2003, 91) – and this view is hardly challenged among literary scholars – it is difficult to gauge the reception of literature, “but by examining marketing we can better grasp how the publishing industry perceives the needs of the market and the images that will sell”. In this chapter, I analyse the changing covers of *The Bookseller of Kabul* as signs of these needs. The central question is, thus, under which kind of apparatus, or *needs*, did the changes towards the female dominated covers take place? And how were these unseen women made seen? What other factors – than the willingness to make the invisible visible – may have influenced or generated these changes? Or still, what might this willingness already imply? Does the astonishing unanimity between the covers of *The Bookseller of Kabul* throughout the globe also point towards a shared reading of Afghanistan? Or does it even point towards a shared interpretation of predominantly Muslim countries? My case deals mainly with Afghanistan, but similar tendencies exist also in relation to other, primarily Muslim, countries: for example, Pamela Pears (2007) has analysed the covers of books by women writers who have ties to Algeria. She found out that even if the contents – and what she calls the messages – of the books she analysed were very different, the cover images resembled each others, depicting nameless veiled women.

In the case of *The Bookseller of Kabul* the objects carried the images of burqa-clothed, or veiled, women to such an extent that they became the most powerful image-actors in the network. The reasons for this unanimity cannot be found only in the explanations individual

¹³⁹ Similar kind of congruence was described also in the previous chapter, and in interlude II: journalists acted in line with some hidden logic of their profession.

designers give, firstly because there is no reason to privilege the explanations they give (in my interviews) to the actual visible results of their decisions, which are manifested in the circulating covers. The covers can speak too. And secondly, designers often referred to expressions such as: the colors seem “distinctly Afghani” (Berger 02.10.09), the picture portrays “a traditional” (Ponagajbo 12.03.10) Afghan cloth or woman. Such categories do not explain *why* they think a traditional Afghan woman looks rather this than that. To understand where these associations derive, we should take a more historically informed perspective on how these associations have been constructed time and again in the West.

What are then these shared meanings that have been historically, and maybe unconsciously, associated with women of Afghanistan? The critical feminist discourse on Orientalism has discussed this thoroughly. As already mentioned in the interlude I, according to Yegenoglu (1998, 98–99), there exists a metonymic association between the Orient and its women, and between tradition and women. This has quite univocally meant that representations of women and their bodies have become to play a central role in the structures of Orientalist discourse – and domination. (Yegenoglu, 1998.) The frequency of veiled women in the covers of *The Bookseller of Kabul* can be read in Yegenoglu’s framework, in which the lack of bodily visibility and transparency of females is thought to reveal the true, oppressive nature of Afghanistan. The metonymic association between the women and the country was not something individual designers brought up, but when using pictures of women on the covers, they brought into the network the tradition Yegenoglu writes about. As was shown in the previous chapter, in the Norwegian debate metonymic associations between the private and the truth – as well as between the situation of women and the country – were explicitly made public. These shared mechanisms of associations were put in motion when the designers chose to use pictures of women on the covers.

A more specific issue than the simple fact that the majority of covers describe women, is of course the question over the veils and the burqas. Why do they appear in so many covers? An immediate answer would be that Afghan women are often veiled, and if they are represented, it is natural that they are portrayed wearing their veils. And the same would be true for burqas. However, in the picture portraying the real family, none of the women wear burqas – and the literary text discusses how the women of the family abandoned their burqas after the

Taliban.¹⁴⁰ This way the cover pictures reflected more the images the designers had of Afghanistan than the family the book discusses.

As already discussed in the interlude I, when the shared understanding of Afghanistan involves a veil or a burqa, along with the image comes certain meanings that have been repeatedly associated with the veil. Already from the 19th century, the strongest associations have linked the veil to the oppression of women. The veil as a universal, ahistoric image, which Mohanty (1986) has described, appears also in the covers of *The Bookseller of Kabul*. Many of the photographs might have been taken in Afghanistan (and as far as I know, most of them have).¹⁴¹ However, they could equally well have been taken in a studio, as only few of them refer in any way to a more specific context or to Afghanistan (see e.g. figures 11 & 13 above and covers_046, 047, 048, 058, 060). Many of the photos are rather cropped, bringing the women close to the viewer.

Even if the covers would not describe, or directly allude to oppression as such, the power of the veil-image as a trope – and when not contextualized any further – can steer the reception towards readings emphasising oppression. A more psychoanalytical interpretation – than the one Mohanty (1986) presents – of the uses of the burqas would suggest that the Western obsession with the veiled woman is a sign of a rejected Western desire to gaze and penetrate something which hides. Yegenoglu (1998) proposes that the Western obsession with veils reveals an ambivalent power relation where the veiled woman both frustrates and fascinates the Western gaze because *she can see without being seen*. The politics of modernity and Enlightenment, which have rested on transparency and visibility cannot cope with this. Thus, the visibility of Muslim women, feminist deeds and domination can easily converge. According to Yegenoglu (1998, 108), the “political rationality that shaped the logic behind the colonial feminist project’s concern with the unveiling of women can” be understood if we put it in the context of modern disciplinary power, which is concerned with “shaping individual minds and bodies based on the knowledge acquired by rendering them perfectly visible”.

A blurb on the cover of an Italian paperback edition of *The Bookseller of Kabul* participates particularly strongly in this discourse of visibility and unveiling (figure 17 below). It portrays a

¹⁴⁰ The text informs that “Leila has given up the burka. --- Sonya and Sharifa [Sultan’s/Rais’ two wives] followed suit. It was easy for Sharifa; she had lived most of her adult life with her face uncovered. It was worse for Sonya. --- In the end it was Sultan who forbade her to use it.” (Seierstad 2004c, 266.)

¹⁴¹ I have not been able to confirm this with most of the pictures, because photo agencies or photographers have not answered my questions.

woman in a burqa, but according to the blurb, the book “has pierced the veil and made the truth surface”.^{li} In other words, in this Italian version different actors came together stressing the images of veiling and unveiling (both visually and verbally) and placed the book into the long chain of associations where the Orient is associated with the veil, and Western descriptions of it are associated with unveiling or piercing the veil.

The practices of hiding and unveiling are present also in some images which do not include burqas. In a Hungarian cover (figure 18 below), a woman hides her face with her hands, and in an Estonian cover (figure 19 below), two little girls hide behind girders. One image, which includes burqas, includes also a girl without a burqa – thus highlighting a contrast between those veiled and the one not veiled (figure 20 below).

The burqa dominated covers often appear on the covers of paperbacks. For example in Italy, the hardcover edition of *The Bookseller of Kabul* portrays the boy in the bookshop (cover_014), but one of the cheap paperback editions, which costs 4,90 euros, represents a veiled woman (figure 17 below).

Similarly, the first US hard cover edition has on its front cover a man bicycling in the middle of a ruined landscape, whereas the paperback edition portrays burqas (the photographer, Thomas Dworzak is the same in both cases) (compare figure 21 below & figure 15 above).

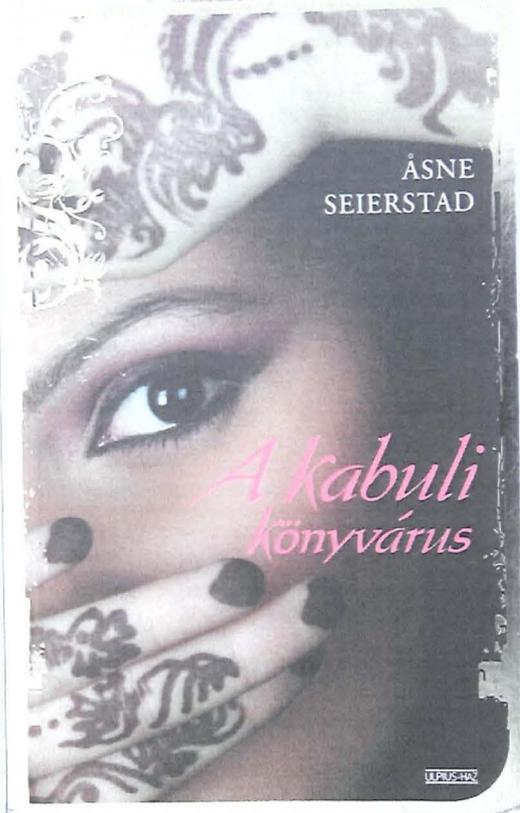
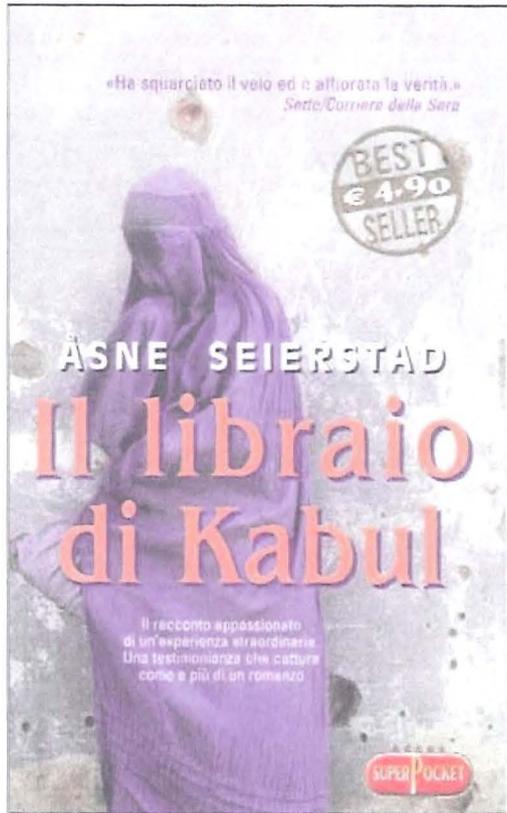


Figure 17. Cover_065. Italian paperback cover portraying a burqa and a blurb (“Has pierced the veil and made the truth surface”).

Figure 18. Cover_046. Hungarian cover with a woman hiding her face with hands.

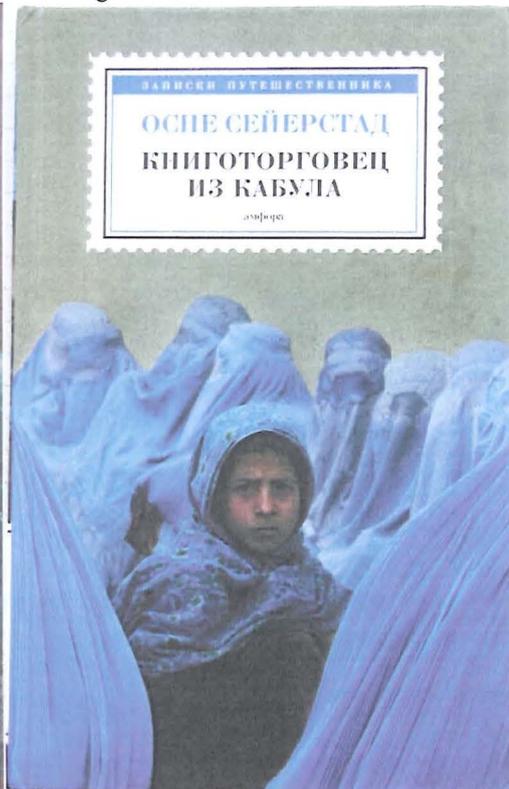
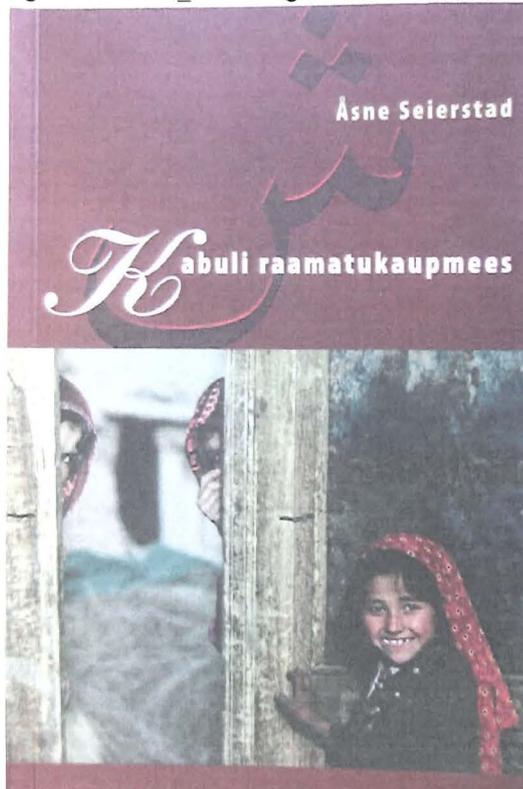


Figure 19. Cover_050. Estonian cover portraying girls behind girders.

Figure 20. Cover_069. Russian cover portraying a veiled girl among burqas.

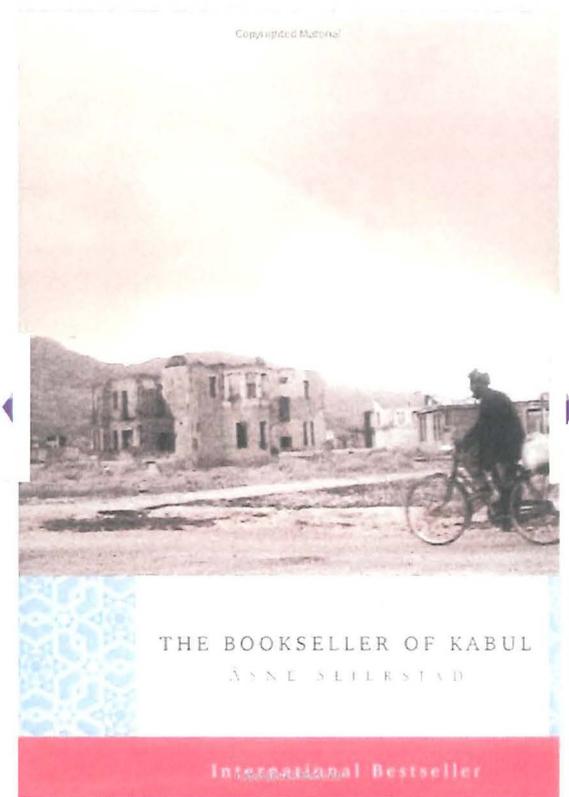


Figure 21. Cover_036. US hard cover edition portraying a man on a bicycle.

What might these changes between the hardcover and the paperback editions imply? Agnus Phillips (2007, 22) writes that publishers sometimes target different segments of the potential audience by producing several covers, or by changing them. According to Phillips (2007, 22), publishers “that aim to sell to a mass market, for example through supermarkets, will decide to play safe with their cover design. --- With volumes destined for a literary market, there is far more leeway for the designer and their creativity”. Following Phillips, the mass market paperbacks use imageries which the publishers find safe. In the US and the Italian cases described above, the burqa clothed women seemed to be safer choices than a man on a bicycle or a boy in a bookshop. Of course not all editions of *The Bookseller of Kabul* followed this pattern, but veiled women were often portrayed on paperback editions. The aforementioned psychological desire for the veiled woman, amongst the Western readership, would be one explanation for the popularity of the burqa pictures on the covers.

If – following Genette (2001, 1) – paratexts like covers enable “a text to become a book and to be offered as such to its readers and, more generally, to the public”, does this not mean that the covers which point towards women and their veiling offer the text to its readers as a book on women and possibly on their oppression? According to a research quoted by Phillips (2007, 23), the front cover is a strong indicator whether the book is intended to be a male or female read. The centrality of the women’s question and the construction of the book as a book *on*

women, and perhaps also *for* women, was in the UK strengthened by the publisher's decision to release the paperback edition under Virago Press, which publishes books only *by* women. The marketing, as it was manifested in Little, Brown's decision to release the book by Virago Press, obviously indicates how the book was perceived – and consequently constructed – by the publisher. This decision linked the book further to the discourse on women, and most likely also directed the book to women readers. At least in many Western countries, women are more likely to be heavy buyers of books, and women read more than men (see e.g. Phillips 2007, 21 for UK, Ekholm & Repo 2010, 50 for Finland, Eurobarometer 2007, for EU-countries). Thus, women on the covers can also be a means to target the best consumer segment.

The developments described above were accompanied with changes in the titling of the book. Above, I referred to a development where the visual references to the family started to give space for a more general gender drama. This development found its parallel in the disappearance of the subtitle from the covers. Not all, but many international editions of *The Bookseller of Kabul* do not contain the original subtitle: Et familiedrama (A Family drama). It has disappeared from most covers, and also from the opening pages of the books. The subtitle is still at place in the first few translations, like in the first Swedish edition (figure 7 above), in the first two Danish hardcover editions (covers_042, 043), and in the Latvian edition (figure 22 below), but the closer we get to the end of the year 2003, the fewer covers include the subtitle (figure 23 below). The disappearance looks almost programmatic, but nevertheless it is not. For example the different German editions still have the subtitle (“Eine Familiengeschichte”), even in the print run taken in 2004 (figure 24 below).¹⁴² I have found no explanations for why the subtitle disappeared, and I will not speculate on the possible reasons behind the changes. Rather I am interested in this disappearance as a *de facto* change in one of the main thresholds of interpretation. As a consequence of this disappearance, the book was not anymore presented to the readers primarily as a narrative on a family.

With my coverage and descriptions in this subchapter, I do not suggest that all the covers portraying veiled women would fall under the same category and point towards some “universal sign of oppression”. Neither do I claim that the general gender drama would have replaced the family drama altogether. Furthermore, individual viewers can naturally interpret the images and the (sub)titles very differently. The covers do have variety and they can be

¹⁴² In addition to these changes, the Czech edition has a totally different subtitle, “Příběhy ze života”, roughly translated as “Stories about life” (cover_068). The reasons for this change are also unclear to me. However, that was the only international edition, which I found, that had changed the subtitle.

perceived in several ways, even subversively. The covers include interesting exceptions, and some images might work against expectations: for example an Indonesian cover portrays a smiling girl under a colourful veil with an old man on the background (figure 25 below), thus playing against the expectations of women being sad, oppressed and under the rule of men etc. A Hungarian cover is rather exceptional, too, when portraying an apparently white-skinned woman under a veil (figure 26 below). A cover used in Thailand is also very different from others: it depicts people – who might form a family – in trousers and skirts (cover_059).

But nevertheless, against these legitimate reservations, it is important to note that certain imageries gained more alliances than others in the social life of the book. Veiled women and burqas formed a recurrent pattern. And perhaps even more importantly, some situations or images were not depicted at all. Except for a Greek cover, where Seierstad sits among other people (figure 27 below), none of the covers portray encounters between (people who could be interpreted as) Afghans and (those who could be seen as) foreigners. Even though foreign troops have been in the country (and especially in Kabul) for years, and even though the whole book is a result of an encounter between Afghans and a foreigner, all the cover images (except for one) exclude these interactions. This exclusion reflects the narrating strategies of *The Bookseller of Kabul*, which do not make Seierstad present in the narrative. But it is also a pattern which seemed to characterise colonial photography, if we follow Malek Alloula's (1981) analysis. Alloula (1981) analysed colonial postcards from Algeria (from the first three decades of the 20th century), and came to the conclusion that there does not exist photographic traces of the gaze of the colonized upon the colonizers. The postcards – just as the covers of *The Bookseller of Kabul* – did not include confrontation of opposed gazes. They do not depict what Mary Louise Pratt (2008 & 1991) has called *contact zones*. By the concept of contact zone she refers to “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination – such as colonialism and slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today” (Pratt 2008, 7). These contact zones do sometimes appear in the narrative of *The Bookseller of Kabul*, but not in its pictorial depictions. Thus, the peritexts effaced certain aspects of the text, which made the image of Afghanistan more complex.¹⁴³

¹⁴³ For example, the chapter “My Mother Osama” mainly describes the contact zones between an Afghan translator and an American journalist, who travel together. However, it is important to note that Seierstad has faded out her own presence in these situations she described (even if most likely she was also on the trip, as another Western journalist). (Seierstad 2004, 237–256.)

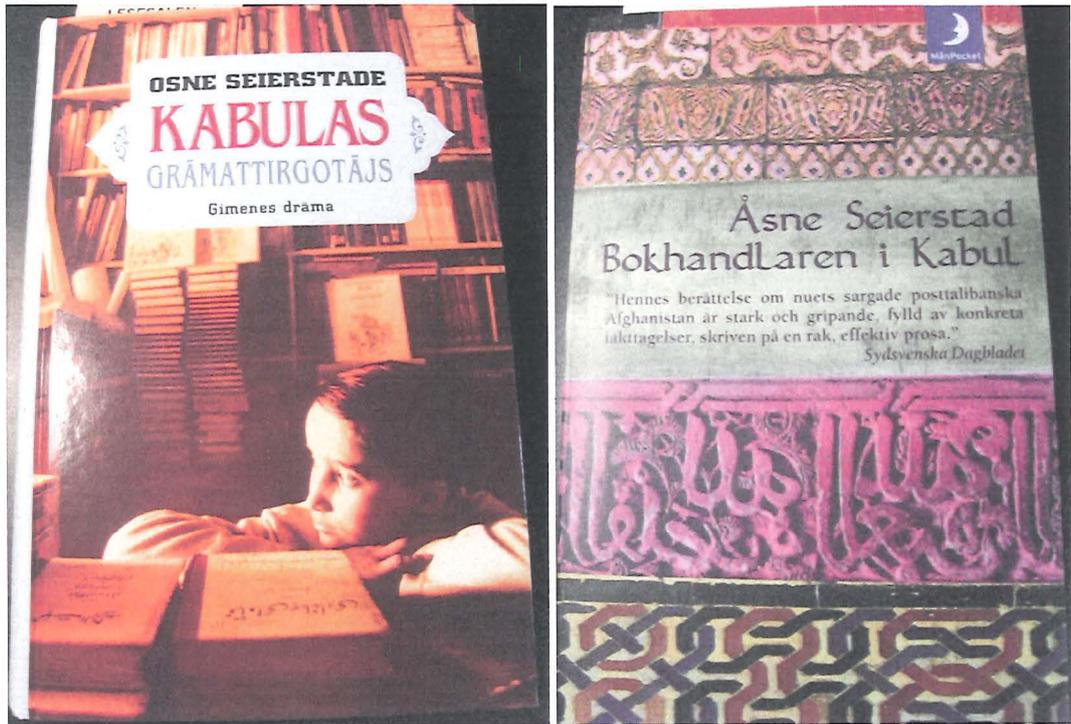


Figure 22. Cover_008. Latvian cover from 2002 including the subtitle.

Figure 23. Cover_041. Swedish cover from 2003, not including the subtitle.

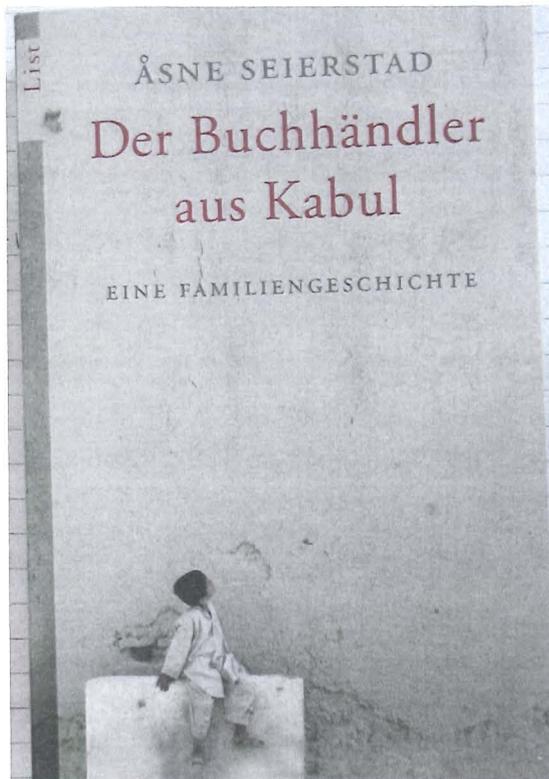


Figure 24. Cover_030. German cover from 2004 including the subtitle.

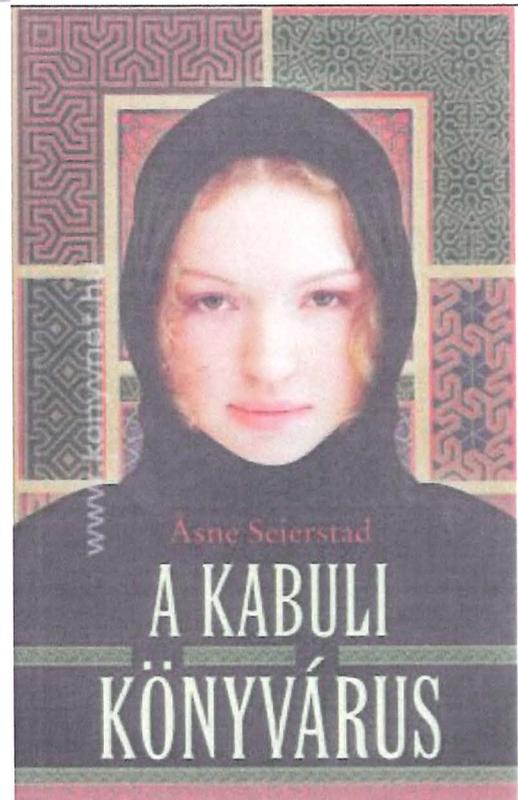
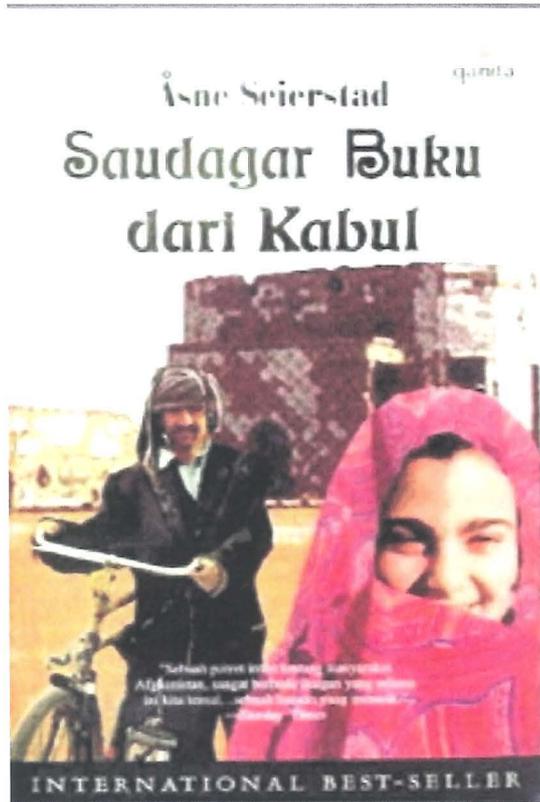


Figure 25. Cover_064. Indonesian cover portraying a smiling girl and a man on a bicycle.
 Figure 26. Cover_047. Hungarian cover with a white-skinned woman under a veil.

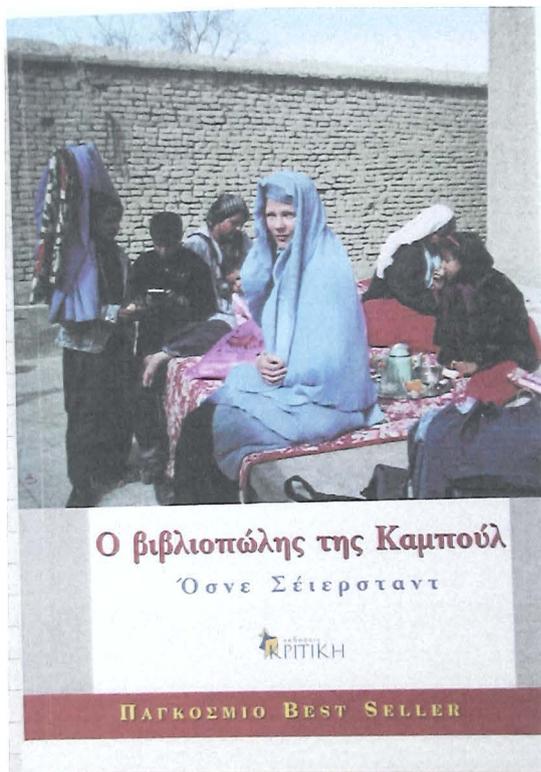


Figure 27. Cover_051. Greek cover portraying Seierstad among other people.

Success on the covers

So far I have discussed mainly the most visible transformations in the covers, namely the changing cover images. But the covers changed also in other ways.¹⁴⁴ In this subchapter, I explore these changes by discussing first those peritexts that emphasised the success of the book. Afterwards, I discuss the blurbs, and how they reflected the book's success and became powerful interpretations of it.

The fading away of the family from the covers was often accompanied in the peritexts by a growing importance put on the book itself. Slowly the covers started to refer to the international career of the book. The covers became self-referential in a way, which emphasised the book's phenomenal success. For example, both the UK and the US paperbacks from 2004 name the book an international bestseller on their front covers (cover_017, figure 15 above). The same applies for the front cover of the Hindi edition from 2006 (figures 8 above & 28 below), and also for the Indonesian edition from 2005 (figure 25 above). The Romanian edition from 2006 informs the potential reader that the book has sold 1 200 000 copies (figure 29 below).

According to Lash and Lury (2007, 5), in the global culture industry, value is added in the movement of the products. They argue that cultural entities have become reflexive in their self-modification, which may explain why the changing covers of *The Bookseller of Kabul* emphasise the globally successful movements of the book. As part of marketing strategies, these references can be interpreted as attempts to persuade the reader that the book is worth reading. As one of my Facebook sources told me, one reason to buy the book was that the "cover had seals and other awards on it" (Facebook 06.04.09a). Another had bought the book because it was "on the ny times [New York Times] bestseller list" (Facebook 27.01.09). The Brazilian cover takes advantage of this, and informs the viewer that the book has appeared on the bestseller list of *New York Times* (cover_027).¹⁴⁴

This status of an international bestseller – that the covers strengthened – was accompanied and partly also strengthened by another development: that of using blurbs. Over the course of time, both the front and the back covers started to include blurbs. Many editions also have blurbs on the opening pages. For example, the US paperback edition (Seierstad 2004c) opens with four pages of blurbs, and the UK paperback (Seierstad 2004a) has two pages of them.

¹⁴⁴ In this subchapter my data does not include only those 31 different cover images discussed above, but it includes all the 69 different front covers and 30 backcovers I have had access to.

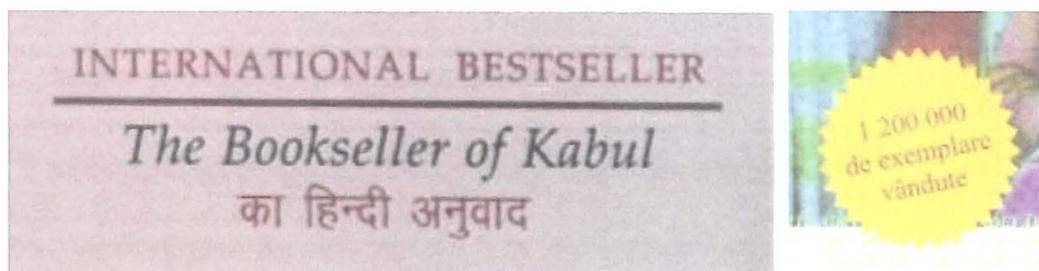


Figure 28. Blurb appearing on the Indonesian cover (cover_025).

Figure 29. A tag on a Romanian cover informing that the book has sold 1 200 000 copies (cover_067).

Blurbs constitute a surprisingly under researched area in literary and reception studies. A telling example of this lack of research is that Genette does not mention them in his *Paratext* (2001), when he lists elements that might appear on a front cover of a book. Genette mentions altogether 18 different elements ranging from the title of the book to the address of the publisher, but not blurbs. He wrote his book already in 1987, which might imply that blurbs have gained more importance after that. However, in the last few years individual articles on the subject have started to appear (see e.g. McGlone 2007, Valor 2005). For my purposes, the most useful of these is the one presenting a linguistic analysis of blurbs and their relation to advertising discourses, written by Lluïsa Gea Valor (2005). According to Valor (2005, 42), blurbs

“evaluate and recommend the book by means of extracts from reviews in well-known newspapers, journals and magazines which praise the qualities of the book and the author. Therefore, blurbs seem to function as factual marketing strategies aimed at getting the potential customer to buy and read the book”.

Valor (2005, 42) writes that “although blurbs cannot be considered representative instances of advertising discourse, they do share the same communicative purpose – to persuade the potential customer”. Valor (2005, 45) highlights that the persuasive nature of blurbs “outweighs their surface appearance as book reviews”.

Valor concentrates on the communicative purpose and the style used in blurbs. In addition, I think blurbs also need to be approached as thresholds of interpretation – as Genette would say – because they position the book in a specific way, which can steer the reception and buying decisions. They function as one more important (and authoritative) paratextual threshold between readers and the text. As Lori Ween (2003, 90) writes on paratexts, they allow

“us to understand how the publishers, newspaper reporters, and marketers have planted seeds that will influence the reception of the text by reviewers and readers. Before most people had read a word of the manuscript, ideas about the text were already circulating, and the event of publication was already being ‘read’ and located.”

Because of their persuasive style (highlighted by Valor) and their material basis as part of the book, the power of blurbs to locate the book and steer the reception may well be stronger than is often thought. Blurbs become part of the book, and they are layers, which position the book in a certain way. Along with the concept of paratexts, as a conceptual tool for research on blurbs, I use Foucault's (1981) notions on the commentary. The most thoroughly researched area of commentaries is of course the one constituted by literary reviews, which I discussed in the previous chapter. But commentaries can also be found in the peritexts.

I put emphasis on blurbs, perhaps even at the expense of the reviews from which they derive, because from the perspective of material culture and actor-networks the blurbs have found more lasting support than most literary reviews. Literary reviews travel with the materialities of their respective media (e.g. newspaper, magazine, or web page), but blurbs do something more: they travel also with the most crucial material connected to literature – with the book itself. Blurbs have built alliances with a greater number of materialities, and actors, than many literary reviews, which are usually read once and thrown to the dustbin. In the following, I concentrate on blurbs on the front covers of *The Bookseller of Kabul*, along with some examples from the back covers, but I will not discuss the blurbs on the inside pages, because their relevance is most likely smaller. These blurbs follow very much some of the general stylistic patterns of blurbs, as Valor (2005) has described them. According to Valor (2005), blurbs often use complementing and elliptic expressions. Complementing expression means intensifying adverbs, positive evaluative adjectives and superlative constructions, which according to Valor are used to complement both the book and the author. Sometimes these compliments are supplemented with modal adverbs – such as probably – or the construction “one of+superlative”, which is a method “frequently used by advertisers in order to convey modesty and gain believability from the audience” (Valor 2005, 52–53). Elliptical syntactic pattern, on the other hand, refers to sentences with no verbs. According to Valor (2005), “ellipsis brings blurbs closer to advertising slogans and headlines, which tend to be as simple and direct as possible to catch the reader's eye”.

The blurbs I have analysed make use of these patterns in several ways. Elliptic syntax is used, for example, in these blurbs appearing on the different covers of *The Bookseller of Kabul*:

- “Authentic and poetic at the same time.” (German paperback, cover_030b)^{liii}
- “A great book and an extraordinary document.” (French paperback_032b)^{liv}

Whereas the book is complemented in the following way:

- “The most intimate description of an Afghan household ever produced by a Western journalist...” (US paperback, cover_039)

And the author like this:

- “Seierstad’s great strength lies in bringing all the characters to life with wonderful dialogue.” (UK paperback, cover_017b)

Modesty in turn is conveyed in these blurbs (emphasis mine):

- “stands as *one of the best* books of reportage of Afghan life after the fall of the Taliban.” (Brazilian paperback, cover_027b)^{lv}
- “An intimate portrait of Afghani people *quite unlike* any other... a compelling read.” (UK paperback, cover_017)

The contents or the vocabulary of these blurbs do not reveal anything very surprising. They regularly used words such as “admirable” and “compelling” (see e.g. cover_039b, figure 16 above). And there is hardly any question of whether they follow the general patterns described by Valor (2005): they are mainly persuasive and positive evaluations of the book. They are unsurprising also in the sense of what is not said: none of the blurbs I have come across, make any reference to the criticism the family – or others – have raised against the book. Negative evaluations stay out of the materiality of the covers.

This persuasive communicative function, however, seems to have some quite unexpected consequences. It might be too much to conclude that blurbs directly diffuse into the vocabularies through which readers make sense of a book, but my online data does give some reasons also for this kind of assumptions. Particular words used in the blurbs could often be found in the reviews readers published online (or more precisely in my data from Shelfari, Goodreads, and Librarything).

The US paperback included on its backcover a blurb, which started in the following way: “An unusually intimate glimpse of a traditional Afghan family...” (Cover_039b.)

The word “glimpse” proliferates online, for example in the following Goodreads-reviews (emphasis mine):

- “If you really want to get a *glimpse* into true Afghan life, buy this book.”
- “It gives a *glimpse* of the reality on grounds after the fall of the Taliban regime.”
- “At different junctures there are *glimpses* of the joyfulness of Afghan society.”
- “She gives us a unique *glimpse* into their day-to-day lives.”
- “It presents the reader with an amazing *glimpse*.”
- “[P]eople curious for a *glimpse* into another world.”
- “Still, it was interesting to get a *glimpse* into this household of modern-day Afghanistan.”
- “[A] fascinating *glimpse* into a culture that is completely different than ours.”
- “The *glimpse* into family life was satisfying to read.”

These "glimpses" derive from the first thirty default reviews of *The Bookseller of Kabul* at Goodreads on 17.05.2010.¹⁴⁵ As mentioned, I have not done any comprehensive analysis of these reviews, and one has to remember that those thirty reviews constitute only a small part of all the 923 Gooreads-reviews, which in turn constitute a tiny part of the readership of *The Bookseller of Kabul*. But the fact that the word "glimpse" appears this often already in the 30 default reviews makes one wonder how independently readers articulate their own views on the book. Similar patterns appear for example also with words "intimate", "portrait", and "compelling" – all of which appear in one of the English editions of the book as well as regularly in online reviews. All this might of course be purely accidental, my methods might not be sophisticated enough, and one can argue that the words "glimpse", "intimate", "portrait", and "compelling" are commonly used in English and simply describe the book very well. Moreover, the online reviewers seemed to use the words in different contexts, thus, showing the independence of the discourses presented in the blurbs. Nevertheless, my sensation is that there was something more to it than a pure accident. Discourses and vocabularies of critics might have a much more straightforward impact on readers than we are accustomed to think – or alternatively online reviewers construct their reviews very much on the basis of the vocabulary used by other online reviewers. This is, however, a subject the closer investigation of which needs to be left for future research, and I could here only offer "a glimpse".

One could say that while persuading the readers, blurbs bring forward certain interpretations of the text at the expense of others. As a consequence, they might end up doing what Foucault (1981) is so concerned about, namely controlling the discourse internally, warding of the free floating of meanings. If we read blurbs as commentaries, we discover an interesting mechanism. As noted in chapter two, for Foucault (1981, 58) commentaries are procedures, which "must say for the first time what had, nonetheless, already been said, and must tirelessly repeat what had, however, never been said". The commentary says something other than the text itself, but on the condition that it is this text itself, which is said, and in a sense completed. Similarly the blurbs on the covers of *The Bookseller of Kabul* say for the first time what has already been said in the book.

¹⁴⁵ By default review or default reviewer I refer to the first thirty default reviews of *The Bookseller of Kabul* on the online sites I have analysed. These reviews appear on the browser window, if the user does not define the preferences otherwise. Default reviews can also be conceived as the most powerful reviews – as they appear on the web sites opening page more often than others. According to Goodreads.com: "The default sorting algorithm on Goodreads uses a variety of factors to determine the most interesting reviews. We won't share the exact special sauce with you, but the ingredients are: length of the review, number of people who liked it, recency of the review, popularity of the reviewer (i.e. number of people who have liked reviews by that person across all books)."

As a form of commentary, blurbs are even more peculiar than literary reviews. They do not only repeat what is not said in the text, but they also repeat what is not said in the review, out of which they derive. In that sense they are commentaries in second potency: they make commentaries out of commentaries. The same point about repeating what is not said is apparent also in the Finnish editions of the book (figure 30 below). The blurb on the back cover refers to *Daily Telegraph* and says: “A remarkable book... honestly and intelligently written”. What the blurb does not say is that the review in *Daily Telegraph* was a joint review of *The Bookseller of Kabul* and Saira Shah’s *The Storytellers Daughter* (Shah 2003). The review does not say that Seierstad’s book is honestly and intelligently written, but it says that: “both of these encounters with Afghanistan are too honestly and intelligently written to stray too far into such treacherous territory [which would use a whiff of orientalism, a trace of biblical sentimentality, a hewers-of-wood, drawers-of-water kind of tone, a vision of simple men bent to humble occupations against exotic backdrops]” (*Daily Telegraph* 09.08.2003). The blurb repeats what the review said, but does not say what it said.

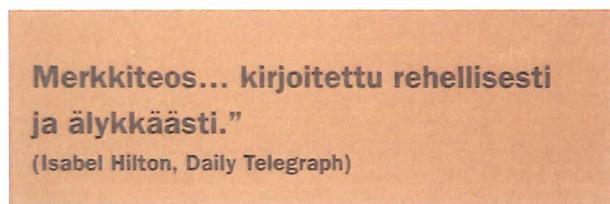


Figure 30. A Blurb from Daily Telegraph on the back cover of the Finnish editions (covers_011b & 012b). (“A remarkable book... honestly and intelligently written.”)

Where did these persuasive commentaries and their repetitions derive from? Some publishers of *The Bookseller of Kabul* used their respective national media as the source for their blurbs. The Swedish paperback edition from 2003 has a blurb taken from a Swedish newspaper *Sydsvenska Dagbladet* (cover_041). It says: “Her story about the present ravaged post-Taliban Afghanistan is strong and poignant, full of practical observations, written in a straight, efficient prose.”^{1vi} According to the designer, the blurb was inserted by the publisher after the designer had done his part (Pettersson 30.09.09) . A Swedish cheap hardcover version, also from 2003, has a blurb taken from another Swedish newspaper, *Aftonbladet* (cover_040). Also for example a Dutch cover (figure 31 below) and a Spanish cover (cover_006) include blurbs from national newspapers.

However, most publishers used blurbs deriving from either the UK or US media. In some cases this might have happened because there existed no national publicity on the book by the time the covers were made, but in other cases the Anglo-American sources were used also after the national media had recognised the book. Consequently, certain thresholds started to

proliferate more widely than others, and these thresholds had been produced either in the UK or in the USA. They also signalled that a positive discourse around the book had started to form itself in the leading Western media. In other words, the actor-network around the book included several major Anglo-American newspapers.

A Danish paperback refers on its front cover to *Time Magazine* and suggests that the book: “Captures details of a society on the brink of change.” (Cover_044.) Quotes from a national newspaper *Politiken* appear on its back cover (cover_044b). The Finnish hardcover edition refers to a blurb from *The Daily Telegraph* (cover_012b), the Lithuanian cover uses a blurb from *The Washington Post* (cover_048b), the Brazilian cover makes use of *The Guardian*, *The Washington Post*, *The Publishers Weekly* and *The New York Times* (cover_027b), just to give a few examples from different countries. An Indonesian (cover_064), a Serbian (cover_015), and two UK (cover_016, cover_017) covers all have, in their respective languages, the same blurb taken from *The Sunday Times*, which says: “An intimate portrait of Afghani people quite unlike any other...a compelling read.” (Figure 32 below.) The message on intimacy is thus supported by the materiality of the book in three different continents. In the manner discussed above, this blurb repeats what was said in the review, but also what was not said, as the review also problematized this intimacy. The blurb comes from the review made by Christina Lamb for *The Sunday Times* (03.08.03), but Lamb’s critical remarks have, however, not entered the objects.¹⁴⁶ The objects are relatively untouched by the criticism put forward in some reviews.

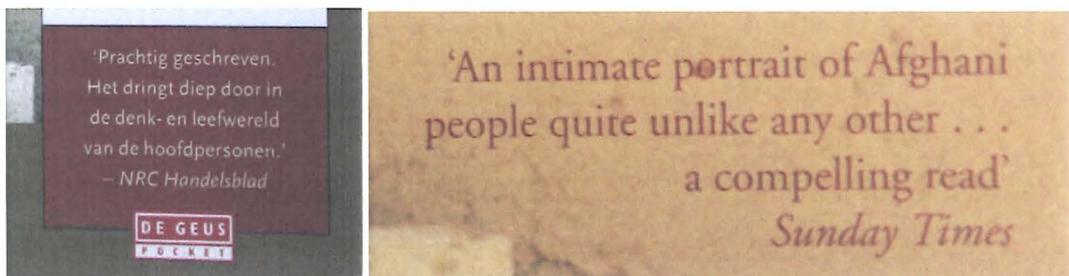


Figure 31. Blurb on a Dutch cover from a Dutch paper (cover_022). (“Well written. Goes deep down into the thought and life world of the main characters.”)

Figure 32. A blurb on the front cover of a UK edition (cover_017).

¹⁴⁶ The reviewer, Christina Lamb, wrote: “But the reader is left with some unanswered questions. Seierstad used two family members as interpreters but their English is poor, so it is unclear how she obtained all these intimate confidences. And how much was her presence responsible for Leila’s sudden desire for independence and the ultimate break-up of the family?” (Sunday Times 03.08.03.) By break-up Lamb refers to the book’s epilogue which starts with the following sentences: “A few weeks after I left Kabul, the family split up. An argument resulted in a fight and the words that fell between Sultan and the two wives on one side, and Leila and Bibi Gul [Sultan’s mother] on the other, were so irreconcilable that it would have been difficult to continue living together.” (Seierstad 2004a, 273.)

Here it is worth noting that some US (cover_036) and UK (cover_018) front covers did not include any blurbs. Unlike publishers in many smaller countries, the US and the UK publishers did not use (probably for their early editions) blurbs deriving from foreign media – whereas the paperback editions were full of blurbs from domestic media (figure 16 above). The US and the UK receptions created their own thresholds for the future editions of the book, whereas many publishers in smaller countries ended up reproducing the thresholds produced in the UK or US media. Also in this sense, even if the book had grown out of the global margins (Afghanistan and Norway), the publishing machines distributed and circulated messages produced in the global centres of power.

Consequently, besides being forms of commentary, with their emphasis on the original (usually well known) source, blurbs can also be said to rest on the author function, as Foucault has discussed it. Marie Maclean (1991, 276) has observed that both “editors and public have come more and more to demand the ‘brand name’ which lends authority to the product”. According to her, along with the name of the author, also blurbs and back cover notices lend the text authority. She approaches this as a phenomenon, which reflects the growth of literature as an object of consumption. As was mentioned in chapter two, according to Foucault (1981) the author function gives discourse coherence, and raises it above ordinary speech. The same kind of process seems to be at play also when names such as *Time Magazine* or *Sunday Times* are used. They give the reader a signal that the text is not ordinary, everyday speech, and maybe not even ordinary literary speech, but something more valuable. If the critic – who is part of the literary elite – gives his/her authoritative signature to a book, this presumably makes it more difficult for an individual reader to dismiss the work. Moreover, the names of well established magazines or newspapers also give a promise of coherence in opinions. According to Foucault (1981, 58), the author-principle limits the chance element of a text “by the play of identity which has the form of individuality and the self”. This identity (finding its existence in the name) works as a principle of grouping of discourses, referring to unity, origin of meaning, and coherence (ibid). Accordingly, a reader expects to find certain coherence in the opinions signed by *Time Magazine*, a coherence that can be viewed with a certain consistency, and which makes the reading experience more predictable.

The same mark of authority, coherence and origin is at play when the book cover has a sticker or a stamp. Some of the UK paperbacks, for example, have a Richard and Judy’s book club “sticker” on their front or back covers (figure 33 below).



Figure 33. A Richard and Judy's sticker on the front cover of a UK edition (cover_016).

Richard and Judy's Book Club was a TV-show in the UK, where *The Bookseller of Kabul* was presented in a one hour programme. During the years it was aired, the book club recommended books, and was conceived as a major player in the British publishing industry. According to *Sunday Times* (15.06.08), in 2008 Richard and Judy accounted for 26 per cent of the sales of the top 100 books in the UK, and Amanda Ross, the club's creator and book selector, was named in the newspaper as "the most powerful player in British publishing". In *The Guardian* (26.02.04), the senior books editor for Amazon.co.uk, Fiona Buckland, said that: "We have definitely noted an uplift for all of the books [recommended in Richard and Judy Book Club] - --." *The Bookseller of Kabul* was mentioned by Buckland as one of the books that have been "made" by the club (ibid.). The book club also sold books it promoted, and *The Bookseller of Kabul* sold 35 670 copies through the club (Bookseller 15.08.08).

R. Mark Hall (2003) has written on the growing role of authoritative readers in the book market and discussed, in particular, the aforementioned Oprah Winfrey Show and a phenomenon he calls the "Oprahfication of Literacy".¹⁴⁷ In the UK, *Richard and Judy Book Club* enjoyed similar kind of reputation as Oprah. Hall (2003) does not make any reference to the author function or its logics, but could we not say that what Oprah or Richard and Judy are doing, has a similar mechanisms to that of the author function but this time happening under the umbrella of promoting other people's books?

Foucault's (1981) writings suggest that the principle of the author, which gives discourses coherence, has steadily grown stronger in the sphere of literature. This seems to be true also in

¹⁴⁷ Oprah's show was produced in the USA, but broadcasted to 107 countries. During the years, all the 48 books Oprah recommended sold more than 500 000 copies, and four of them sold 2 000 000 in the USA. (Hall 2003, Striplas 2009, Farr 2005.) According to Hall (2003), the reading of the book was not necessarily at the centre of the club. Hall (2003, 657) writes on the show: "if you haven't read the book, the message is that the Oprah Winfrey Show can have the same effect", and quotes Oprah: "Even if you haven't read the book, Song of Solomon, you haven't heard of Toni Morrison," Winfrey insists, "there's still so much wisdom that you can get out of this dinner, as I did".

the digital age, or maybe more precisely, a new figure or a function might be emerging in the book business, one that concentrates on promoting. Above, I discussed blurbs and their functions not as criticism or as evaluation, which can lead to different results, but as a practice which is meant to persuade, promote, and evaluate only in a positive register. A similar attitude guided also the work of the critic writing for *The Guardian*, who said he only reviews those books by his friends he likes (Judah 15.02.10). In this context, for example, Richard and Judy and *Time Magazine* are layers in the process in which a reader is seeking for coherence, and for names that can guarantee the quality of a text. The Richard and Judy sticker gives a signal to the reader that the book should meet his/her expectations and wishes – if s/he has liked a number of books in the book club before. Blurbs, awards, and these promoter figures – as well as those critics who concentrate on reviewing books they like – take literary criticism towards fulfilling mainly a promoting function. If the institution of criticism has been moving towards the practices used in advertising, the authority and weight given to the critic institution needs to be re-evaluated.¹⁴⁸

Author on the covers

As I suggested, blurbs can be read as commentaries but also as a mode of discourse, which rests on the name of the source (the media) and operates similarly to the author function. However, in the transformations of *The Bookseller of Kabul* the author function became even more efficient through the figure of Seierstad.

Already many blurbs take Seierstad as their point of reference: they refer to the act of writing, or to her. And without exceptions the references are complementing, as is customary for blurbs. For example, the Swedish paperback edition tells on its front cover that “Her story” is “strong and poignant” (cover_041). The US paperback quotes on its front cover *New York Times Book Review* and announces: “Seierstad is a sharp and often lyrical observer.” (Cover_039.) On its back cover, three out of the four blurbs refer to Seierstad: the quote from *Entertainment Weekly* suggests that “Seierstad imbues a grim story with language of desolate beauty.” The blurb taken from *Washington Post Book World* states that: “Seierstad writes of individuals, but her message is larger.” And finally, the quote from *Denver Post* says: “Seierstad infiltrated a world most readers will never see.” In the last quote, Seierstad’s authority (which grows out of lived experience) is directly contrasted with the life worlds of “most readers”. (Cover_039b.) This may give the author (or the act of writing or observing) an advantage against the text and the act of reading or interpretation.

¹⁴⁸ This further re-evaluation, however, goes beyond the scope of my thesis.

One blurb from *The Observer*, appearing on the back cover of the UK paperback (cover_016b), goes as far as to state that the book is: “Stunning ... [and] fascinating, in good measure because Seierstad has clearly made the difficult decision to tell it like it was ... it deserves to sell well: it is quite unlike anything else.” This blurb refers to Seierstad as someone who has made a decision, and as someone who tells the truth – as the originating subject of a truthful discourse. This is then linked to the idea that the book “deserves to sell well”. In other words, the potential reader should buy the book, because Seierstad’s discourse is worth it – and maybe also because many other books are not worth the same.

These blurbs constitute one part of the author function, but in the end, it is the information the covers contain *about* the author, which most strongly underlines the power of the author. The author function would of course be at play already through the fact that the book has a named author, but a deliberate strengthening of its role is characteristic for the transformations the covers of *The Bookseller of Kabul* went through. In other words, it is not only the actual name of the author, printed on the cover and on the title page, but also other aspects of the book jacket such as author photos, descriptions of the author, and list of her previous work, which work as important layers in the biography of the object and in its packaging.

Books by previously unknown authors need to be positioned with special care, as Phillips (2007, 24) notes. According to him, “author brands are of increasing importance”, because “familiarity with the author is the factor most likely to persuade someone to buy”. Thus, getting “the author branding to work effectively is imperative”. (Phillips 2007, 25.)¹⁴⁹ Seierstad was in practice unknown outside Scandinavia before *The Bookseller of Kabul* entered the international markets. Thus, her authority had to be constructed by other means than by referring to her previous books, or by trusting that the potential readers know her. References to her awards, her experiences as war correspondent, and her language skills were popular means to build her authority on the covers. The US paperback edition (cover_039) has on its back cover a picture of Seierstad stating that she “has received numerous awards for her journalism and has reported from such war-torn regions as Chechnya, the Balkans, Afghanistan, and Iraq. She is fluent in five languages and lives in Norway”. The fact that she is fluent in languages can strengthen her credibility as a correspondent and a travel writer. The back cover does not tell that she does not know Dari, the dialect spoken in Rais family (the

¹⁴⁹ Noteworthy here is the word *brand*. The author function, or author’s name, could also be analysed as brands, which function through the production of difference (see e.g. Lash & Lury 2007).

readers, however, learn this from the revised foreword, whereas the original foreword did not include this information) (Seierstad 2004a, 4). Similar kind of introductions appear for example on the back covers of an Estonian (cover_050b) and a Lithuanian (cover_048b) edition. Along with the introductions, also a photograph of Seierstad appears on several back covers. Below is a picture showing the back covers of a French, Russian, US, Lithuanian, and four Danish editions all including Seierstad’s photograph. In one of the Danish covers the picture takes more than one fourth of the space on the cover. (Figure 34 below.)

The Dutch edition from 2005 has a picture of Seierstad filling the whole of the inner front cover, and the opening page introduces Seierstad along with a long quotation from her (figure 35 below). The same Dutch edition has a quotation from Seierstad herself on its back cover: “As a journalist, I had reported the war in Afghanistan and thought it would be interesting to write on the lives of ordinary people. I wanted to tell the story behind the stereotypes.”^{lviii} (Cover_022b.) Interesting here is how she herself tells her book is beyond the stereotypes – as if she or the publisher (inserting the quotation) were the ones to decide this.¹⁵⁰

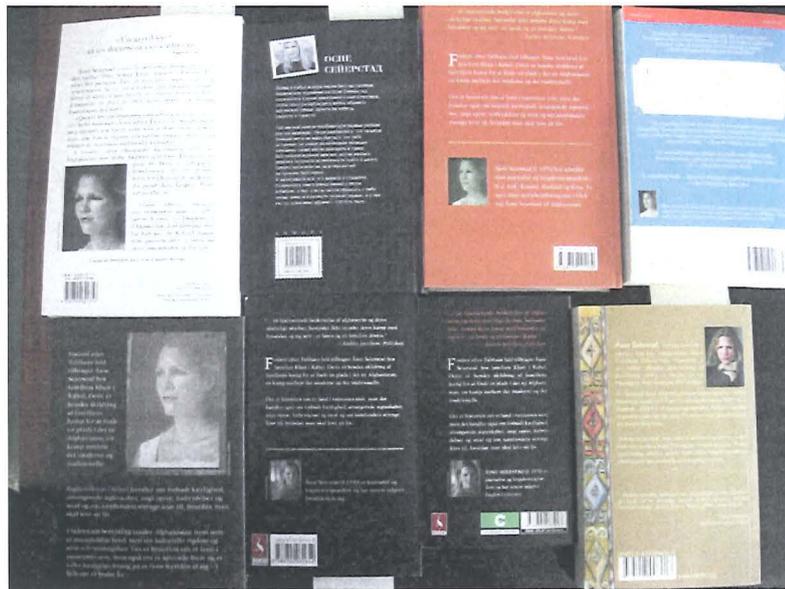


Figure 34. Back covers of a French (cover_032b), Russian (cover_069b), US (cover_039b), three Danish (covers_042b, 043b, 044b), and Lithuanian (cover_048b) editions.

¹⁵⁰ Worth noting is also that in an interview, attached to the US paperback, Seierstad says that the family was “very typical” and the father was “very typical”, too (Seierstad 2004c, Reading group guide, 3). If she only lived with one family, how can she know what was typical and what was not – without relying to stereotypes?



Figure 35. Seierstad on the inner front cover of a Dutch edition (cover_022).

The most extreme example of the growing role and influence of the author function on the covers is one of the later Swedish front covers, which portrays only a photograph of Seierstad herself against a wall (figure 36 below). Seierstad's name is written on a much bigger font size than the name of the book, and a small blurb from *Aftonbladet* says "...written from inside with great sharpness". The designer of this cover told me the following:

"My goal was was [sic] to make what the publisher asked me to do. The whole cover was the Publishers [sic] idea, he gave me the photograph and asked me to type her name large. So that's what I did. My design was to choose the typeface and the crop and composition of the photo. The idea was that you should recognise Åsne from a long distance basicly [sic]." (Molin 30.09.09.)

The designer explained the publisher's choices the following way:

"The publisher wanted a cover especially for the sale-version of the book, it was already a bestseller I think, and they saw the potential to sell even more on the annual book-sale here in Sweden. Everybody recogniced [sic] Åsne from all the media-attention back then so I guess that they used that to sell some more books." (Molin 30.09.09.)

This edition was designed especially for the annual book-sales for which "publishers often make cheaper hardback-copies to sell", as the designer told me (Molin 30.09.09). The link between the author and the commercial fate of the book appeared obvious for the publisher, or this is at least how the designer understood it.



Figure 36. Cover_040. Seierstad on the cover of a Swedish edition.

Conclusions about the changing covers

In order to summarise the main clusters of the changes in the covers of *The Bookseller of Kabul*, I will conclude by taking the example of the Danish covers. The transformations between different Danish covers can be defined as a passage from a family drama to a gender drama, marked by the authority of the author, as well as commentaries, and by signs of success. The *first* Danish cover, published already in 2002, portrays figures walking away from the viewer, in mist towards light: two children carrying bags on their heads, one taller figure further ahead, and some unrecognizable elements, which could be grave stones (figure 37 below). It is impossible to say for sure whether the persons are male or female, and what the elements on the right are. The name of the author and the name of the book are written on the same font size. The subtitle “et familiedrama” appears under the title. *Another* Danish edition (figure 38 below), published by the same company Gyldendal, was released in 2003, already a year after the original. The transformation is dramatic: the new cover portrays a woman walking in a burqa and in high heels. The subtitle still appears on the cover, and so does the name of the author and the name of the book (with slightly bigger font size than the name of the author). Next year, in 2004, the same company launched its paperback edition (figure 39 below), which went through small changes, but the edition printed in 2008 (figure 40 below), crystallises the transformations I have discussed so far: it portrays the same burqa-

clothed woman as the 2003 edition, but now the name of the author is on a bigger font size than the name of the book, the subtitle “familiedrama” has disappeared, and a blurb from *Time Magazine* has emerged.¹⁵¹ The general figure of women has taken over the family drama, and so has the author over the story. The back cover portrays a picture of the author and advertises her book *The Angel of Grozny* (cover_044b). I contacted the designer of the new cover, in order to understand what led to such a dramatic change, and he was willing to take part in my research. However, after receiving my questions he never answered them, nor my reminders.¹⁵²

As mentioned, according to Phillips’ (2007) different covers are used for different audience segments, and paperbacks use safe images. The two Danish covers were very different, the paperback version being (once again) the one presenting the veiled woman, whereas the first hardcover version had a more ambivalent image. In this respect, the Danish examples would propose that images of veils are influential marketing tools when a book enters the mass market.

Even if it is impossible, in the final instance, to know and verify how blurbs, disappearing subtitles, or the presence of the author on the covers influence different readers, I make the simple presumption that something, which exists, is visible and appears on a cover is also more influential than something, which does not exist or does not appear in a visible form. Existing blurbs or subtitles bear more relevance than those, which do not exist. As my excursion to the vocabularies of the online reviewers suggested, they may even influence the readers rather banally. Another presumption I make, and which follows Foucault (1981), is that especially the procedures built on commentaries and author function are elements that ward off the free proliferation of meanings. Thus, I would suggest that these changes on the covers of *The Bookseller of Kabul* point towards a deepening control over the free floating of the meanings associated with the book.

¹⁵¹ However, as a general rule, in the 69 front covers, the name of the author is written in the same or in a smaller font size than the name of the book.

¹⁵² I sent my emails on 01.05.09 and on 15.05.09.



Figure 37. Cover_042. First Danish cover, first used in 2002.

Figure 38. Cover_043. Danish cover, first used in 2003.

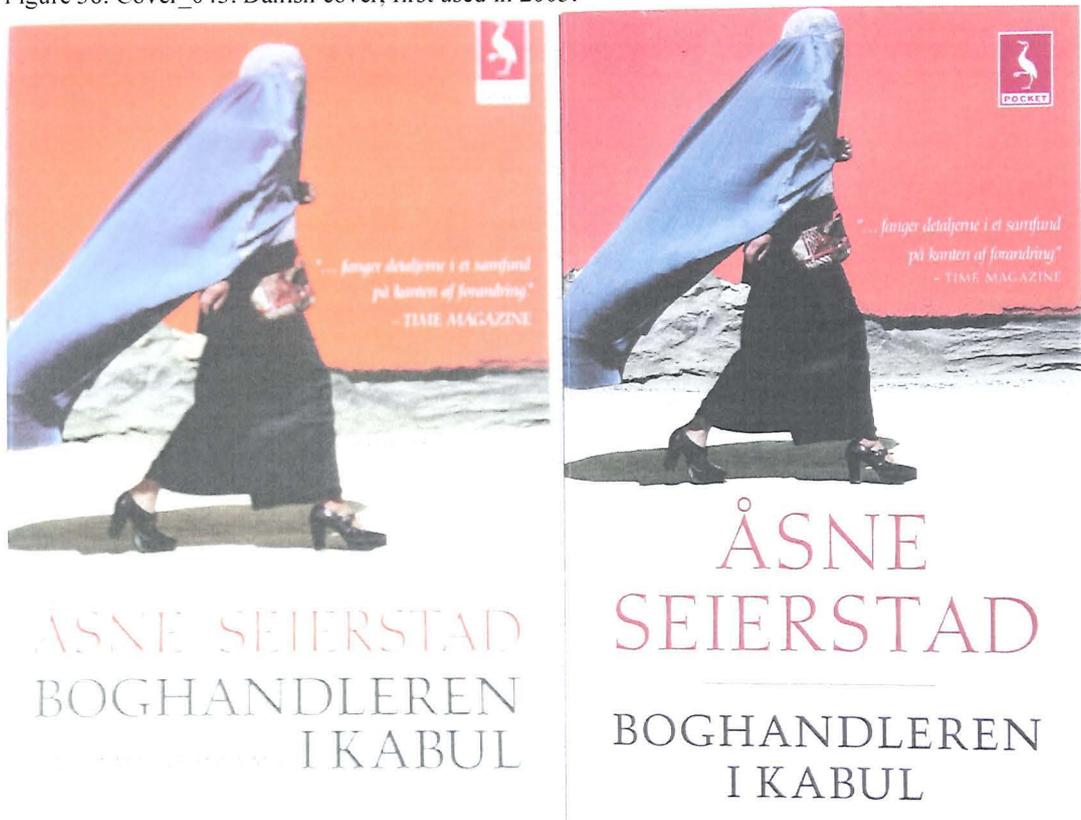


Figure 39. Cover_044. Danish cover, first used in 2004, including a blurb.

Figure 40. Cover_045. Danish cover, printed in 2008, including a blurb and the author's name on a bigger font size than the title.

This presumption that elements visible on the object are more influential than other elements can also be explained by referring to the principles of ANT. If from an infinite number of different possible interpretations of a book, certain interpretations manage to build alliances with other actors and materialities, we should acknowledge that these interpretations are more influential and powerful than some others. In this chapter, I have looked at the enrolments that different actors succeeded in making and the different materialities that supported their interests. Concretely, for example, the interpretation made by the journalist Tim Judah was supported by the paper of *The Observer*, by the virtual environment of *The Guardian's* web pages, as well as by the materiality of those book covers which printed part of this interpretation in the form of a blurb. After following the traces and the associations this particular interpretation built with different actors, it is possible to say that it became more powerful than many other interpretations, and thus limited the free proliferation of meanings, and ordered the space where the reader makes her/his interpretations. This is why I have discussed the blurbs more extensively than the reviews from which they derive: the blurbs have found longer lasting and further reaching material support than the rest of the reviews. The same applies for the interpretation of the book as a women's book: over the course of time the cover images started to support those interpretations that emphasised gender issues. These interpretations found support also in many epitexts discussed in the previous chapter, and they had a strong position in the other changes the object went through, and which I will discuss in the following.

Added Extras

At the crossroad of the authorial and the editorial changes of *The Bookseller of Kabul's* paratexts lies one more interesting change. I end this chapter on the transforming object by discussing two paratexts, which were added to the US paperback edition (Seierstad 2004c). I find them important both in terms of how the book transformed, but also in the context of wider developments in book publishing. I am referring to such practices as attaching interviews of the author to the book, or other appendices ("extras") like reading group guides and essays. As these elements are becoming more widely used, my analysis here is not supposed to stay at the level of *The Bookseller of Kabul*. Rather it should be read as one more comment on the changing object of literary studies.

The paperback edition in question was first published in October 2004, little more than two years after the launch of the book in Norway and a year after the controversy became public. This US edition contains two noteworthy appendices: (1) "A conversation with the author of *The Bookseller of Kabul*" and (2) a reading group guide named "Questions and Topics for Discussion". According to the text, both of these are made by the author herself (Seierstad

2004c, Reading group guide).

The conversation is part of an interview with Seierstad published originally in *Pittsburg Tribune-Review* on 09.11.2003, a few months after the family Rais had started the controversy. Still, the interview did not discuss their critical views, and the author was not confronted with critical questions.¹⁵³ In the newspaper, the article was accompanied with a short sidebar where Rais' critical remarks got mentioned, but it did not include any quotations from the family, and neither was the author asked about the issue. This sidebar did not find its way to the peritexts, and as the conversation did not mention the controversy, the conversation-with-the-author-peritext does not mention the reactions of the family, nor the alleged problems the book caused them. Almost on the contrary, the conversation works as a space where the author can restate her perspective, and bring authority over the text.

Referring to Sultan Khan this peritext informs its readers that:

“Soon after Seierstad started living with Khan's extended family, however, she saw another side of the bookseller that differed from her initial impressions. Sultan Khan – he is in his fifties, although his exact age is not known because of shoddily kept birth records – firmly ruled over his household, his word being final on all decisions.” (Seierstad 2004c, Reading Group Guide, 2.)

Later the text quotes Seierstad, who says about Sultan Khan that: “He's an Afghan patriarch like everybody else” (Seierstad 2004c, Reading Group Guide, 3). Even if Seierstad and the text refer to the character, by then the categories had already been mixed so that if people knew of Shah Muhammed Rais, they also knew that (at least according to the author) he is identical to Sultan Khan. She had confirmed several times publicly that everything in the book is true. *Mutatis mutandis*, when Seierstad says that Sultan Khan is an Afghan patriarch like everybody else, in her own discourse she means Shah Muhammed Rais.

From the Khan family, the peritext turns to the author herself. The conversation reveals that the author has donated “royalties from *The Bookseller of Kabul* worth \$ 300,000 to the Norwegian Afghanistan Committee, which supports educational and health-care initiatives in the country.” (Seierstad 2004c, Reading Group Guide, 5.) Seierstad comments this donation in the following way:

“I have seen so much misery. That's why I donated so much of the money from the book back to Afghanistan. It's not that it makes me feel good, but it makes me a bit

¹⁵³ I contacted the journalist who wrote the interview on 30.09.09. She replied the same day by sending me the text, but she did not reply to my questions on her decisions regarding the interview.

happier that now hundreds of boys and girls are going to school because of the book. Many babies are getting saved because I'm supporting midwives and nurses, who are needed because the birth mortality rate is so high." (Seierstad 2004c, Reading Group Guide, 5.)

Here Seierstad explicitly defines some of the desirable consequences of the book. The emphasis on the charity can be taken as an appeal to the readers to donate money to Afghans.¹⁵⁴ But it can also be taken as an argument against those who think the book should never have been published. It is perhaps more difficult to criticise the book after one has learned that midwives and nurses can be supported "because of the book". The passage also suggests that Seierstad has taken into account her privileged role as a well-earning Western author. The passage, however, does not discuss whether Seierstad's book contributes to a situation, which produces the need for charity. It does not problematize the role the book might play in creating global inequalities.¹⁵⁵

If the "conversation with the author" -peritext concentrates mainly on the role of the author and her opinions, the other later peritext in the US paperback, the reading group guide, shifts the focus to the reader. Reading group guides seem to have an ambiguous double function: they are supposed to activate the passive reader and – through encouraging discussion – turn the reader into an active member of the audience. However, this activation is encouraged inside the frames, which the guide itself offers. The activeness is, thus, guided activeness. What kind of a frame does the US paperback then offer for the reader?

The guide includes twelve questions, out of which seven put focus on gender issues, more precisely:

- on marriage (question 1),
- on different female roles (question 3),
- on relations between female and male members of the family (question 5),
- on women and education, as well as on women and Taliban (question 12),
- on Sultan as a man and his behaviour at home (question 9),
- on the opportunities for young men (question 7),
- and on Seierstad as a woman (question 11).

¹⁵⁴ This appeal found another material embodiment in a Finnish paperback edition, which includes an extra page advertising UNICEF's charity program (Seierstad 2004d).

¹⁵⁵ Charity has been subject to fierce debates, and I will not engage myself here with its complexities. In short, charity (and also development aid) is often criticized as being a substitute for equal wealth distribution – thus, advocating rather a world view according to which poor masses do not need agency. Out of the theorists used in this thesis, at least Spivak, Žižek and Ferguson have criticised charity and aid – Ferguson (1994) as the depoliticizing force, Žižek (2006 & 2010) in relation to capitalism's structures and Spivak (e.g. 1999 & 2008) as the contemporary version of the civilizing project of colonizers.

Only one question refers to books and publishing (question 2). I have already discussed the growing emphasis on the gender issues in relation to the covers and to the early reception. The shift from the private sphere to the more general story of female oppression or Afghanistan could be seen in the covers, in the reviews, and also in the reading group guide. In other words, the transformations that took place in the covers found their parallels in the guide.

This peritext, which spatially (and most likely also temporally) follows the reading experience and the foreword, asks the reader to consider, among others, the following questions:

- “What can the reader learn from the bookseller’s experience about crime and punishment *in Afghan society*?”
 - “How does fashion reflect the social changes *in Afghanistan*?”
 - “How do female roles *in Afghanistan* differ?”
 - “Discuss the ways in which marriages are agreed upon and carried out *in Afghan society*”
- (Seierstad 2004c, Reading Group Guide, 7–9. Emphasis added.)

In other words, the guide discusses the private and individual story of the family as a generalizable story of Afghanistan – even if the foreword warns about this (Seierstad 2004a, 7). “Afghan society” and “Afghanistan” are used as points of references or general categories, which can be discussed on the basis of this one reading experience. The guide does not ask how “marriages are agreed upon and carried out in” the *Khan family* but in “*Afghan society*”. Neither does it ask “how do female roles in *Khan family* differ”, but it encourages the reader to think of the different roles “*in Afghanistan*”. Consequently, the individual experience is offered as a source for general observations, like in the following question: “7. Mansur, who is extremely enthusiastic about the opportunity to make his pilgrimage, almost misses the chance to go. What does this tell us about the social and emotional outlets currently available for young men *in Afghanistan*?” (Seierstad 2004c, Reading group guide, 8. Emphasis added.) This question is a good example of how the experiences of the family’s son are made to represent the current possibilities in Afghanistan. The reason for him almost missing the chance is his father who orders him to stay in the shop.¹⁵⁶ Hence, in the question we can see a transfer from one domestic despot into a generalized category of domestic despots, who dictate the chances that are available for young men in Afghanistan. The question sets aside hesitations on whether the family in the book should be seen as a typical Afghan family or not.

¹⁵⁶ The following passage in the book discusses why Mansur almost misses his trip: “Mansur is determined to make the pilgrimage. --- He needs only to get Sultan’s permission, as the journey will entail being away from the shop for several days. If there is anything Sultan hates, it is Mansur being away. --- But then Sultan says no. His father will not do without him for the short time the trip will take. --- ‘You are my son and you jolly well do what I say,’ says Sultan.” (Seierstad 2004a, 135.)

This tendency to make easy transitions from one family to wider categories is even more alarming in the light of the data I collected online. In some reviews published by readers online, the cultural generalisations made on the basis of Seierstad's book were applied also to other countries and areas. Many online reviewers of *The Bookseller of Kabul* did not necessarily make strong differentiations between different predominantly Muslim countries. One reader among the first 30 default reviewers at Goodreads.com wrote that the book "does highlight how deep the cultural differences are between Middle Eastern and Western thinking".¹⁵⁷ Another thought that the book "gave a lot of information, especially for someone who doesn't know a whole lot about the middle east". At Shelfari.com, one of the first 30 default reviewers stated that Sultan "is devout Muslim and the epitome of a Middle Eastern male", while another one suggested that the book is a great "insight to the hardships of women in the Middle East in the current time". Afghanistan is not considered to be part of the Middle East, but several online reviewers thought the book revealed something about Middle East. This might have happened because of the lack of knowledge or because Afghanistan is thought to be so similar to the Middle Eastern countries. Either way, as a result, the book constructed not only images about the individual family, nor even Afghanistan, but also about Muslims and the Middle East.

These categories of Afghanistan and Middle East, evoked by the book and the reading group guide, easily found their counterparts in the categories of "us" and "them". For example, the question number seven in the reading group guide concerning Mansur (quoted above), constructs a we (= "us") as a different category from the groups of people described. It does not refer to the reader in singular, but in plural and simultaneously builds an association between the reader(s) and the writer of the guide, an association that constructs the "we". Here it is useful to return to Gupta's and Ferguson's (1992) views presented in chapter two. They propose that research should focus on the mechanisms through which cultural differences between "us" and "them" are constructed and produced. The reading group guide seems to participate in this kind of construction by inviting the reader to make generalisations about Afghans on the basis of this one book at the same time as it encourages the reader to identify with the category of "us".

This process of generalisations is challenged only in one reading group guide question. Question 11 asks:

¹⁵⁷ The concept of a default review was explained above.

“Seierstad explains that she had a rare opportunity to observe Afghan family life. How did the fact that she is a woman affect her access to Sultan Khan’s relatives? How might her background as a European woman have affected her interpretation of the people and events she observed?” (Seierstad 2004c, Reading Group Guide, 9.)

This question opens up a space for further reflection between reality and its mediation. In the last instance, it might even encourage readers to think about global functions of power, and evoke critical readings. However, the author is not left without support: her experience is elevated, as being “a rare opportunity”. It is also a position with which the reader should be able to identify: a European woman, or a Western woman are most likely the subject positions of many readers of the US paperback.

The reading group guide, and the conversation with the author, bring together the two procedures discussed above under Foucault’s analysis, namely commentaries and the author function. These peritexts are obviously commentaries, but they also build heavily on the author function as they are offered under the name of the author, and as the conversation discusses the opinions of the author. In that sense, their ability to control the freedom of the discourse, which the literary text in principle offers, is particularly strong.

As these peritexts appear on the pages of the book, this takes us back to the material aspects of discourses. To take the ANT-approach, a durable power relation (and also a durable discourse which has a disciplinary function) requires materialities to which the humans can rely on, and which constitute partly the relation itself, because what we call a social relation is also material, technical, textual etc. (Law 1991, Latour 1991.) A change in the object always implies some changes in the relations supporting the object. Those changes in the object, which require materialities such as pages and ink, should be read as elements in the on going struggles for power. The US paperback edition is interesting exactly from the perspective of changing power relations. It is exemplary in how it demonstrates the differences between subject positions – and between the abilities to change the supposedly fixed text, or to keep it the same. The author or the publisher may add new thresholds to the book, whereas readers or the objects of the textual representations cannot make these kinds of interventions.

However, it must be noted that from the 32 editions I have been able to analyse, these extras appear only in the US paperback. In this sense, it would be a mistake to think that the reading experiences of *The Bookseller of Kabul* have in general been as much framed by the author as the experiences of the readers of the US paperback (even though some editions have something reminiscent to an author interview included in them, see e.g. the Dutch edition, figure 35 above). On the other hand, the book was very popular and gained lots of readers in

the US.¹⁵⁸ However, my interest in analysing the possible functions of these peritexts derives also from the overall developments in publishing. This practice of inserting peritexts associated with the opinions of the author, is gaining ground especially in paperback publishing. For example, Harper Perennial attaches to many of its releases what they call P.S.s. These include “extras” like interviews, essays, insights.¹⁵⁹ The same phenomenon is more common in the DVD-releases of movies, which often include different extras (interviews, or how-the-movie-was-made documentaries). These practices usually gain little critical attention. Reviewers seldom discuss them, or their complex relation to production, reception and the “original text”.

There is, of course, nothing intrinsically bad, suspicious or undesirable in peritexts such as the conversation with the author and the reading group guide. On the contrary, they can serve the reader by giving information on the circumstances in which the book has been produced. Consequently, they may open up the process of reification and present the book to its reader not as a closure but as an on-going process of meaning making. Thus, they can actualise the reader’s right to know what s/he is reading, and in the case of *The Bookseller of Kabul* satisfy the wishes of those commentators who thought Seierstad had not told enough of her methods in the book (see e.g. the aforementioned comments by Bech-Karlsen 19.02.09).

However, in the case of *The Bookseller of Kabul*, these peritexts seem to function above all as instruments of control. The conversation and the reading group guide were made and inserted in the middle of the controversy, and thus they should be read in relation to the epitexts discussing the controversy. Having their material basis in the book, these peritexts have been more durable and diffusible than most of the critical epitexts. Thus, they play a central role in the process of enrolling readers. This becomes even more evident when the changes are read side by side with those elements that were kept constant. Thus, the remaining question is: what stayed the same in *The Bookseller of Kabul*, or which changes never took place?

4.5 WHAT STAYED THE SAME?

Despite my emphasis on changes, in many ways, *The Bookseller of Kabul* also stayed the same. None of the later editions include new epilogues or other pieces of text that would

¹⁵⁸ Moreover, for the purposes of my interests in the war, the US editions provide crucial material, because the US policies have played a central role in the continuation of the war.

¹⁵⁹ See for example a paperback release of Chimamanda Ngozi Adiche’s *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2007).

explain the controversial context of the book. Only the foreword has been modified to meet part of the criticism, but without the change being mentioned. The “literary text” also remained mainly the same – except for those small removals discussed in the beginning of this chapter. This relatively unchanged nature of the authorial paratexts and the literary text between the covers can be read as a sign of unwillingness of the author or the publishers to make any large scale changes.¹⁶⁰ As a consequence, one central aspect stayed the same throughout the editions: the family stayed under the authorial control. There are no examples in any of the editions of an attempt to let the voice of the family find other channels inside the object – like journalistic interviews, essays written by the family or discussions between the author and the family. If we do not count the disappearance of the family from the covers, there are no explicit signs in the objects of the controversy that has been going on since 2003 (also this disappearance is relative: some new editions still have the family on the cover). Only the back cover of an Estonian edition (cover_050b) referred to a court case in one sentence.

All these developments together efface and maybe also weaken the role of the family (both as family Rais and as a general category) in the book and in its reception. The transformations I described do not only refer to the actual disappearance of the picture of the family from some of the covers (as this was partly what the family hoped for, and in that sense a response to their wishes). Rather, I refer to more general observations on how the name of the author, or the commentaries, became to dominate the message, how the particular (family Rais) turned into a general (Afghanistan), and how these were linked to the economic success of the book.

The public interventions of the family might have made the relation between the author and the object more visible and vulnerable than it usually is. They might have called into question the authority of the author over her text, but this challenging only took place if the individual reader was aware of these interventions. The Rais family has mainly tried/been able to make their interventions through media texts and other epitexts. These epitexts are, however, most likely less durable and less diffusible than the peritexts, as they do not travel with the book, and as newspapers or TV-programs are rarely stored at homes, or returned to. Of course these circulating epitexts might stop potential readers from buying or reading the book, or they might make readers more critical towards the content – but the precondition is that the reader has to come across these epitexts. Because the object itself did not include information on these interventions – except for the Estonian edition (cover_050b), mentioned above – this

¹⁶⁰ One explanation for this unwillingness could be the shameful aspects associated with removals – interpreted often as self-censorship. Seierstad’s decision not to make major changes to the text, or withdraw the book from the market, are easily interpreted as deriving from her willingness to defend freedom of expression as a principle, but what if this reluctance has as much to do with shame?

decreased the probability that readers received any information of them. A majority of those people I approached through Facebook had not heard of the responses of the family. Out of the fifteen Facebook-users, ten did not know that the family had criticized the book – and this was the case as late as in 2009.¹⁶¹ Furthermore, only one out of the fifteen knew that Rais had written a book himself. One could assume that Facebook-users follow international news more than people in average – as they spend a lot of time in the internet. Thus, the fact that they hardly knew of the criticism, implies that other readers might have known about it even less. Moreover, even many who worked with the production of the international editions did not know about the interventions. The Polish, Czech, and Brazilian cover designers all told me that they had not heard of the controversy – even if these editions were published after the controversy had started, between 2004 and 2006 (Ponagajbo 12.03.10, Didunyk 15.02.10, Iaccarino 16.03.10). On the other hand, some of those who were part of the production of the book, and had heard of the controversy, did not think it effected their decisions. The cover designer for the US paperback edition (cover_039) wrote: “I was aware of the controversy, but didn't feel it was relevant to the design of the cover. The issue had not yet been resolved.” (Berger 02.10.09.)

The question whether the criticism *should* have been included in the object is of course complicated. Scandals can be turned into advertising, and highlighting the controversial nature of a book might speed up the sales. An easy presumption is that controversies sell – and that there is no such thing as bad publicity. Moreover, it is not clear whether the family would have liked to appear in the objects more than they already have. And for example those covers, which did not include the family, might have been an attempt from the side of the publishers not to intensify the controversy. However, the absence of explicit criticism should be contrasted with those changes in the objects that were actually realised. For example, the interview and the reading group guide – the way they were actualised – can be interpreted as reactions to the controversy. They did not have to appear, but they did – in forms which were favourable to the author. By emphasising the experiences and the perspectives of the author, they shifted the balance of power ever more strongly from the family to the author and the publishers. The author, the object, and those actors directly in an alliance with either of them, seemed to work in unison and in favour of the author's interests in the controversy. One should not read this as an explicit strategy, because most of the actors were never in contact with each other, and neither did the author control all these changes. The changes should rather be seen

¹⁶¹ Facebook 03.05.09; 19.04.09; 10.06.09; 17.02.09; 27.04.09; 24.04.09; 06.04.09a; 06.04.09b; 11.04.09; 27.01.09.

as acts of an apparatus, which answered to certain needs and interests of different actors who occupied the producing end of the process. Most likely they reflect certain tacit knowledge that existed at the background of the editing and publishing processes. For all of these actors, good sales were beneficial, and the family stood for an unpredictable disturbance. Furthermore, even if the changes would simply reflect the current trends in publishing – and have nothing to do with the controversy – from the view point of the readers the impact is the same. Barthes (1987) acknowledged that the reader as an active producer of meanings can be born only if the authority of the author is killed. Extras, such as the conversation with the author, or a reading group guide authorized by the author, do not exactly pave the way for the reader as an active producer of meanings.

Consequently, certain characteristics of the contemporary literary and capitalistic culture seem to limit the active role of the reader, or critics. The way books are produced inside a certain type of regime and culture, gives certain actors the ability to transform the message while leaving others without it. Copyrights grant the author and the publisher such legal rights that others – like family Rais – do not have. Especially those editions launched in the middle of the legal and public controversy – when the relational power of the author had been called into question – help us to *discuss the durability of the book, or the homogeneity or reproducibility of reading experiences, not as material properties of print, but more as practices that have to rely on materialities, but also need to be socially maintained*. These modifications might even illustrate and be reactions to the anxiety that authors might not be the exclusive source of meanings for those texts that circulate in their names (see Coombe 1998, 170). Moreover, because authors have been identified as important factors guiding book consumption (Phillips 2007, 23), their authority might be strengthened at the expense of readers simply because of marketing needs. One further reason to strengthen the role of the author might be the quest for literary value. According to Foucault (1991, 109), because of the historical role of the author function, the meanings ascribed to a text – and the status or value accorded to it – depend on our answers to questions such as: from where does the text come from, who wrote it, and under what circumstances? The practices I have described can be seen as practical means to answer these questions (by relying on the materiality of the book) already before they are even posed. If the object offers answers to all these questions, this gives at least a temporal advantage to the publisher and the author when trying to influence the reception. It might also be, that the reader does not look for the answers elsewhere, if s/he is satisfied with what s/he is offered in the book. It is as if the object already seals its value and its meanings before the actual reading experience, when it offers selective information about the book's circumstances, its routes and its author.

This chapter has followed the trajectories and transformations of *The Bookseller of Kabul*, and discussed what they reveal about the human evaluations enlivening the thing. In ANT-terms, these changes can be conceived as attempts to enrol the readers, to build – with the help of the object and its peritexts – associations between the text, the author, the publisher, and the reader. The changing peritexts of *The Bookseller of Kabul* can obviously be ascribed different functions, but reading them relationally, as having relations with other actors, made certain functions appear as more important than others. In addition to serving the literary text, the changes served also the career of the author, they were tools to enrol audiences to the side of the author in a juridical battle, and they promoted such TV-shows as *Richard and Judy's Book Club*. In the case of *The Bookseller of Kabul*, the transformations established an unbalance between on one hand the growing role of the author, the positive commentaries, and the elements stressing the successfulness of the book, and on the other hand the family and the critical commentaries. This unbalance undermined the possibilities to challenge the book. Consequently, the developments discussed in this chapter bear witness to the problematic nature of books as commodification of our common language, books as highly institutionalised and culturally valorised form of communication, which are hard to challenge.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The research for this thesis has taken place in the middle of unfolding events. As I was typing my analysis on my computer, the case kept on transforming and producing new data. Most of the time I have been a few steps behind the hybridities I have wanted to describe and capture. There has been no place of exteriority from where to write any conclusions. As a consequence, I have been writing with a very concrete feeling that there might be a mass of significant information, which is not available for me – and because of which I might draw very wrong conclusions. Many of my informants have kept something for themselves, which has strengthened the feeling that I might well be on a wrong track. Perhaps nothing in the controversy is what it seems. Seierstad and Rais might have signed a secret contract, or they might have had an affair (which is actually something some of my informants believed). The whole controversy might have been a PR-stunt. Or Seierstad might have dictated everything: after all, the two adversaries were in contact before the article on Rais' reactions was first published. The family might have made everything deliberately in order to get publicity and out of Afghanistan... These paths are possible, and most likely they contain some truth. But in the end, is research not always dealing with appearances – rather than indisputable facts? It is those appearances one has to interpret and analyse, but without forgetting that there might be more to the case than what the methods can reveal. As Latour (2005, 122) has written, research itself is a source of uncertainty – rather than something which excludes it. In a comforting passage he writes:

“What we are doing in the field – conducting interviews, passing out questionnaires, taking notes and pictures, shooting films, leafing through the documentation, clumsily loafing around – is unclear to the people with whom we have shared no more than a fleeting moment. --- Even when we are in the midst of things, with our eyes and ears on the lookout, we miss most of what has happened. We are told that the day after that crucial events have taken place, just next door, just a minute before, just when we had left exhausted with our tape recorder mute because of some battery failure.” (Latour 2005, 123.)

According to Latour (2005, 124), a researcher is someone who manages to live with this uncertainty and still produce hopefully good texts. These texts are themselves mediators, artificial and fabricated, but exactly by acknowledging this artificiality they can become more accurate. This kind of research does not result in comprehensiveness, neither does it guarantee that all the crucial points or actors would be included in the text, rather it gives descriptions of certain actors, from certain perspectives.

This uncertainty of research resonates well with my theoretical propositions about books. Throughout this thesis I have – both implicitly and explicitly – argued against understanding

books as closed entities. The sense of closure, so often attached to printed books, obscures a whole variety of hybrid actors operating around, inside, and in relation to, the physical object we call the book. Thus, I have argued for *an extended notion of the book as a relational process that has its complex material and immaterial trajectories*. As a consequence, I have looked for methods which would acknowledge these hybrid characteristics of books, and be able to trace processes beyond the text between the covers. This way I have tried to understand books as places of productivity. As has become evident, I have done this quite differently from literary scholars, such as Roland Barthes (1971), who have argued strongly against closed works in the name of texts or textuality. Instead, my approach has drawn inspiration from the teachings of material culture studies. It has sought to approach *The Bookseller of Kabul* as a worldly text, to use Said's (1983, 4) phrasing. The controversy offered an intriguing opportunity to develop an approach which would challenge the reification processes behind books. As a matter of fact, the controversy itself worked against the reification of those social relations that books need in order to exist and have influence.

However, arguing against closures does not, of course, mean that everything is possible, that there are no limits, constrains, halts, nor stop-overs. Quite the contrary. In this thesis I started with the widest possible openness, or indeterminacy, in order to see where, when and how the network was limited, closed or cut. Starting with the idea that actors and their actions are indeterminate and contingent led me to identify moments when free floating got stopped and the network closed, at least momentarily.¹⁶² My specific interest was in those limits which were supported by materialities, or which had created lasting alliances with well-equipped actors, such as legal and state institutions or ownership structures. In the case of *The Bookseller of Kabul*, some powerful closures occurred because of immigration legislation, copyrights and the legal trial. But equally well, each change in the object – a material embodiment of (human) action – was also a form of closure, even if these changes could again be called into question by other changes. For example, peritexts created authoritative thresholds or frames for reading: positive blurbs ruled out negative evaluations, and the foreword gave specific reading instructions at the expense of other approaches. The name of the author or commentaries, described by Foucault (1981) and discussed in this thesis, stood – if not for closures – at least for partial limits to the network. These kind of practices may well be gaining more ground in future because of the growing interaction between digital media and books, which multiplies the number of paratexts. In addition to these limits, my thesis, too,

¹⁶² Here I see the political strengths of ANT, which can otherwise be accused of political conservatism and ineffective micropolitics (see e.g. Noys 2010). The method, namely, helps to identify concrete limitations and closures which work as barriers to change.

should be conceived as a form of closure: it has promoted certain readings of the book and the controversy at the expense of others. The thesis ends at some point, and I will have to close my work, so that the reader can again open and question it.

In the last instance, my methods, and the wavering between openness and closures, have been an attempt to approach the questions posed in my introduction and in chapter two: how do books generate consequences, and what can we learn about human evaluations by following the trajectories of books? In order to find the answer, I have empirically followed *The Bookseller of Kabul* both as an object and as an element in a debate, or a controversy. Through my investigation I have tried to show how it emerged and operated, how it built alliances to other actors, and what kind of consortiums were created around and through it. I have discussed the ways in which it was collectively produced, and how the post-production, or reception organised itself. Consequently, I have tried to illustrate how varying and rich the spheres and forms of mediation are. Following Latour (1993b, 40), I would say that the different actors I have been following were “all renegotiating what the world is made up of, who is acting in it, who matters, and who wants what. They [were] all creating --- *new sources* of power and new sources of legitimacy, which are irreducible to those that hitherto coded the so-called political space”.

Still, I have not found a definitive answer to my question about literature’s consequences. If anything, ANT teaches us to be cautious of generalisations of this magnitude. ANT has been designed to investigate immanent and contingent processes, not general laws. As a consequence, my thesis will have to settle for more modest conclusions. In that sense, *The Bookseller of Kabul* should not be made to stand for anything. It does not reveal or prove how the institutions of literature or the book markets work. A Chinese collection of poems, or an American cook book would perhaps behave very differently from an (ostensibly) non-fiction book about an Afghan family written by a Norwegian. Hence, I must admit that I may not be able to explain how books in general generate effects, but my extended notion of the book as a networked hybridity, and the journey through the career of *The Bookseller of Kabul*, should have opened up new perspectives. Going through a global career of a book is itself a rarity in today’s research. By doing that, I have tried to show what sort of elements can contribute to the success of a book, how a book can be used, how it reproduces itself and certain concepts (like literature and freedom of expression), or how a book – as an institutionalised form of communication – can be played against other forms of communication. I have attempted to figure out how the consequences of a book get constructed somewhere between individual readers and the text, through numerous mediations.

The methods used in this thesis have hopefully demonstrated that literary studies can gain and benefit from a dialogue with material culture studies, and even with science and technology studies (STS). However, my work also revealed how laborious this dialogue can be. It showed how Appadurai's and Latour's teachings easily expand the research of even one single book to almost unmanageable dimensions. Trying to cover the global trajectories of an international bestseller led me to contact tens, if not hundreds, of persons all over the world. This meant I could not build very close contacts with each of them – explaining them my intentions and expectations. Moreover, my own intentions of course changed over the course of time. I spent enormous amount of time trying to find people and their contact details, explaining my research to people who were really not that interested, and trying to find someone to translate the dozens of languages I could not read. It remains to be seen whether these kind of methods can find wider resonance in literary studies. It would certainly be very laborious to apply them to several cases simultaneously, or to comparative approaches. But if data and research questions are well defined, the approaches introduced in this thesis should enrich our understanding of literary practices and their consequences.

As the tradition of material culture studies teaches, books carry, facilitate, create, and modify meanings. Human evaluations can be ascribed to them, and they can in return change these evaluations. This is why it is important to understand how they behave as objects. Social bonds and relations become durable thanks to the materiality of the book. Now its time to return to these relations, and continue the analysis started in the interludes.

The Bookseller of Kabul and the war

The social bonds that have interested me most in this thesis are those that draw links between books or publishing practices, and the war in Afghanistan. My underlying political concern has been the war, and how certain orientalist temptations, descriptions or discourses can turn into material effects or the war. How can we take the crucial step from describing representations of others to describing the possible consequences of these representations? How does an object – such as a book – contribute to the process of a war? What sort of human evaluations have been central both for the war and *The Bookseller of Kabul*, and what are the conjunctures between the two? In other words, can we make the war in Afghanistan and a Norwegian book commensurable, or can we give an articulated description of the mechanisms which could make them commensurable? I doubt it. Texts and non-textual effects stay in different ontological categories: texts cannot kill, but bombs and bullets may do. Moreover, despite all the emphasis put on commentaries and collective reading experiences in this thesis, in the end, I cannot say whether the reading of *The Bookseller of Kabul* made any difference in the minds of its different readers – or in the minds of those who read epitexts of it.

But still – after my descriptions – we should be closer to those mechanisms which establish relations between the book and the war – even if these relations are rarely direct. The war and the book may stay incommensurable, but it is exactly that incommensurability which deserves our serious attention. If we refuse to look at books and wars side by side because they belong to different categories, we are unable to see the mechanisms of political meaning making processes, even propaganda, in our own days.

The Bookseller of Kabul does not turn into war, but it is intertwined with the war effort. Chapters three and four described in detail both the explicit and implicit conjunctures between the book and the war. They examined, for example, those moments when readers transformed their individual reading experiences into publicly presented opinions about Afghanistan, or even Middle East. The chapters described instances when time and again journalists or cover designers chose – out of infinite number of possibilities – the burqa to represent the text. Many commentators and paratexts presented the book as the truth about Afghanistan, not as a story about one family living in Afghanistan. This Afghanistan, evoked by the paratexts, was often a place in need of Western attention and active engagement. The most visible common nominator between the actor-network of the book and the war was the idea that Muslim women are oppressed and need to be unveiled or saved. My theoretical presumption here was that also ideas, concepts and tropes – for example those drawing a metonymic association between women's rights and burqas – should be seen as actors. Consequently, their circulation and the strength of those spokespersons, who use and promote particular ideas, or certain interpretations of concepts, become central concerns for research.

Here we can recall Judith Butler's writings on the frames of war, which were discussed in interludes I and III. In short, Butler's (2010) key question reflects my concerns about the circulation of certain ideas or interpretations of Afghanistan. Her question is the following:

“Can there be the continuation of war or, indeed, the escalation of war, as we are now [in 2010] witnessing in Afghanistan, without first preparing and structuring the public understanding of what war is, and without suppressing any visual, audible, or narrative accounts of war that might break open a popular resistance to war?” (Butler 2010.)

Butler's answer is of course no, and so is mine.

In other words, the war effort is possible, or at least easier, thanks to the continuous reproduction of those frames that support it. I suggest that one such frame is the one that separates Muslim women from Muslim men, representing women as those who need to be saved, and men as those who need to be attacked. This separation enables the legitimization of wars (predominantly against men), in the name of women. Both Butler (2009) and Razack (2004), as introduced in interlude I, have said the same: the claims for women's freedom are increasingly being instrumentalized in favor of state violence against Muslims (Butler 2009,

104–106); and it is especially the body of the Muslim woman, which is being used to justify the violence against Muslim men (Razack 2004, 129–130).

Another one of Butler's frames, discussed in the interludes, is the one that helps to make certain lives more grievable than others, which works "to differentiate the lives we can apprehend from those we cannot" (Butler 2009, 3). How to approach *The Bookseller of Kabul* and the controversy in the light of these frames? At first glance, Seierstad's book can be conceived as a project which tried give life to the enemy, the Afghans, those who are not quite apprehended as living. At least this is what Seierstad herself said, she wanted to give voice to the Afghans. Her book can be understood as an attempt to enrich the image of Afghans so that we could apprehend and grief their injuries and deaths. This argument can be made especially as regards Seierstad's portrayal of women: she was supposed to describe the domestic life in Afghanistan, concentrating on the stories and destinies of women. But exactly this concentration on women made the book a powerful tool for those supporting state violence against Muslim men. Failing to see this, may easily result to the reproduction or circulation of those frames which help to continue the war.

This framing – which combines women's rights with wars – is currently so strong that *The Bookseller of Kabul* did not escape it. The book was often discussed inside certain culturalist frames, introduced in interlude I. The culturalist approach presents a stable Afghan or Muslim *culture* as the source of – and as the only explanation for – people's misery in Afghanistan. That way it constructs differences between "us" and "them", and obscures the hierarchical interconnectedness between people and places (see Gupta & Ferguson 1992). Moreover, the culturalist explanations often end up suggesting liberal values and rights as the only emancipatory solution. In Norway, *The Bookseller of Kabul* was often used for producing such differences between people. It was intertwined with the call to action against women's oppression in Afghanistan. Some even said that the privacy of the family was secondary to the need to receive information about the country, thus reflecting Butler's views that the enemy is not really comprehended as living – as someone having all those same needs for privacy and respect a Westerner would have. Others were ready to sacrifice their privacy in the name of freedom of speech, which was considered as a grounding pillar of democracy. Internationally, the book helped to circulate the typical imageries and discourses on Muslim women as those who need to be unveiled by a Westerner. In so doing, it reinforced the metonymic association between veiled women and Afghanistan.

The book of course discussed also other topics than gender, but its reception foregrounded the gender perspective at the expense of these other themes. This way the book was taken over or hijacked by certain tendencies against others. As a consequence, *The Bookseller of Kabul* is a good example of Latour's (1987, 258) idea that there is no intrinsic quality to a statement

which should be foregrounded: rather, focus should be put on the processes where different actors with different motives carry forward and modify statements. In the case of *The Bookseller of Kabul*, the actors seemed to be most willing to carry forward messages concentrating on oppressed women. Moreover, Seierstad played a very complex, if not dubious, role between being on the one hand a political representative or spokesperson for Afghan women, and on the other hand of being a transparent reporter who represents the stories of the women. Spivak's argument that the indifferenciation between these two roles marks the place of interests, is important here. As was discussed in interlude III, according to Spivak, when intellectuals produce themselves as merely reporting on the non-represented subject, we are dealing with the intellectual's own interests and ignorance of her institutional responsibility. (Spivak 1988, 279–280.) Consequently we can ask, whether the rights of women in Afghanistan can be fought for by representing them as voiceless and mute people in need of Western representators. I personally believe the answer is no, especially when their representation goes as far as to correcting the statements of those who are represented – as happened in the case of Aziza Rais.

Butler, however, says that the frames combining women's emancipation and the war – through the representations of Afghans by Westerners – do not need to be eternal. As discusses in the interlude III, according to Butler, the frames never fully determine what we see and apprehend. She proposes that, especially in the age of mechanical reproduction, the circulation of cultural products necessarily departs them from the contexts to which they have been limited (Butler 2009, 9). This leads us to understand “both the frame's efficacy and its vulnerability to reversal, to subversion, even to critical instrumentalization. What is taken for granted in one instance becomes thematized critically or even incredulously in another.” (Butler 2009, 10.)

The Bookseller of Kabul landed in new contexts each time it was republished or commented on, and something similar to the process described by Butler started after the book had been translated into English. In this sense, the intervention of the family against the book can be interpreted as an encouraging and important moment of breakage in, or from, the frame. At its best, the family's intervention could have shown how the “received renditions of reality” can “break with themselves” (see Butler 2009, 12). This is why it constituted an important – and all too rare – moment in recent framings of the war in Afghanistan. For a moment, it made the existing frames vulnerable. It made some commentators see that Afghans are not necessarily the same as Western representations of them. They are instead living beings whose feelings can be hurt – just as the feelings of a Norwegian family could be hurt if their private life was exposed in more than two million copies. And thus, we can grieve their losses. At least for a moment, some Westerners could feel empathy for a family whose private and intimate life was sacrificed in the name of free expression or the need to produce knowledge about Afghanistan.

However, as was shown in chapters three and four, this intervention had its limits. It was concretely worked against, and criticised by the author and in the publishing processes. One only needs to remember the reading group guide in the US paperback edition or the public epitexts in which the views of the family were undermined. The message of the family did not proliferate as widely as the book and Seierstad's opinions. Moreover, the Norwegian immigration authorities also did their part to keep the old frames reproducing themselves. This way certain narratives that could have worked against the frames of war were suppressed, or attempts were made to control them. A number of actors tried to determine what could and should be said on the matter.

This brings us to the central aporia of my thesis: throughout the text I have not defined what a consequence is or can be. On the contrary, I have discussed a great variety of events, phenomena or effects that may be called consequences. This way I have tried to stay loyal to the principles of indeterminacy. I could not know what a consequence might be before I had followed the actors. As a result, I have, on one hand, discussed the reactions of the family and their asylum process, but on the other hand, I have also discussed stereotypes, images of Afghanistan and the perception of the war. This undefined nature of the concept of consequences has hopefully allowed me to demonstrate how the generative potentialities and the productivity of books can be approached both from the grassroots level, where individual feelings may be hurt or privacy violated, and from a wider perspective, which concerns collective formations of meanings and ideas related to the war. Furthermore, what is essential to note is how the legal sphere, or the court only took into account those consequences the book may have had on the individual, Suraia Rais, whereas it is impotent in front of the reproduction of the frames, discussed above. The book may have influenced its readers' perceptions of Afghanistan, it may have changed or confirmed certain attitudes people have of Afghan or Muslim men – and in the end of the war. But the court could not take these latter consequences into account, nor make Seierstad accountable for them. Seierstad may be held responsible for the consequences the book had on the plaintiff, but the reproduction of the frames is on nobody's responsibility. This is why the importance of the private intervention of the family should not be underestimated: exactly these private consequences enabled – or gave initiative and material for – the critical evaluation of the wider mechanisms.

***The Bookseller of Kabul* as a product of the publishing industry**

Following from here, I would say that *The Bookseller of Kabul* was made to fight a conflict on behalf of people, of social principles, or of different frames. There exists discrepancies or conflicts between, for example, a right to privacy and that to free expression, or between saving Afghan women by withdrawing and by intensifying the war effort. As mentioned, the verdict given in the Oslo District Court balanced between these discrepancies. The book

embodied these conflicts, and made them visible, or durable. This is the basic teaching of material culture studies: objects facilitate and maybe also create conflicts, frames, and in the end the materiality of wars. In other words, books play hybrid roles in wars.

I believe it is important to keep this perspective alive, otherwise our understanding of literature and its abilities stays restricted. If we promote reading, and see it as a means for emancipatory ends, the need to analyse thoroughly the mechanisms which turn it into effects should be a central concern for critics. In this thesis, I have discussed what disabled and enabled *The Bookseller of Kabul* to create consequences. I have revealed how this particular book interacted, how it built alliances, how it behaved and worked as a mechanism, which started as something and ended up being something else. Certain mechanisms came into being: discourses were controlled, and the object used for certain political ends without anyone wanting to take responsibility over its possible consequences.

Still, this thesis did not include any big revelations: everyone knows that publishing is a business. Everyone knows that publishers promote their books in the way that they like, and not according to some principles of objectivity or moral ideals. But by discussing the mundane characteristics of the literary world I hope to have made the reader think twice, when s/he encounters books that have received institutional admiration, that are named as important, or when someone appeals to international critical appraisal, or uses sentences such as: reading should be promoted; reading is important; books are valuable; all reading is good. All these practices and opinions take place inside a literary apparatus which is rich and diffuse, but also has its limitations. The way “writing is institutionalised today, in the book, the publishing-system and the person of the writer”, as Foucault (1981, 63) has described it, is not only emancipating, but also constraining.

Seierstad’s book has received almost everything a book can receive: good sales, good reviews, publicity, and awards. It has been named honest, true, and necessary. It was defended even in a court’s judgement as being beneficial for an important public debate on Afghanistan. The journalist writing for *The Guardian* stood behind the book, because according to him, all stories about Afghanistan are necessary. In Kopytoff’s (1986, 67) vocabulary, as a thing, it has had an ideal career. And still my own sensation – even conviction – is that our views of Afghanistan could easily be more nuanced without reading it. Should we be able to say that not all reading is worth appreciation or promotion, after all? *It is not the act of reading as such, which has a potential to transform individual lives for better, but it is the much more complex relation between what we read and how we are able to read it, which steers the consequences of reading.* Almost without exceptions, reading takes place inside an apparatus. It is these conditions of reading and the possibilities to subvert them that we should be concerned about – instead of simply trying to promote reading as a practice. This reminds me of Foucault when

he imagines alternatives for those questions that preserve the author function. These new questions would replace the old question of “Who really spoke?” and instead inquire: “What are the modes of existence of this discourse? Where has it been used, how can it circulate, and who can appropriate it for himself?” (Foucault 1991, 120.)

Globally speaking, the publishing industry reproduces – or carries with it – very much the same structures of unequal balances of power as the rest of human practices, like economy, politics, and military operations. Or to put it in a more Foucauldian (1990, 94) way: if we see power relations not as exterior “to other types of relationships” – but rather as “the immediate effects of the divisions, inequalities, and disequilibriums” which occur in these other relations – analysis of literature’s potentialities requires investigating the relations inside the publishing industry and literary institutions. Literary publications are problematic as political tools, or as tools that take part in the construction of the frames for our thinking, because certain characteristics of literary institutions are problematic. As formulated in interlude III, books participate in the global circulation of ideas as commodities, which carry intellectual ideas and which are protected by the principle of freedom of expression. In my introduction, I discussed the links and the discrepancies between understanding books as either sacred objects or as capitalist commodities. In the following, I elaborate this further by returning to some characteristics of book publishing as they appeared in the case of *The Bookseller of Kabul*. They concern above all (1) the closed nature of today’s publishing, (2) its basis in the practice of selling a commodity, as well as its (3) centralised, and (4) (what could be called) ideologically valued character.

(1) Throughout my research there was one group of actors that was difficult to approach. These were not journalists, nor academics. These were people working for publishing houses. As mentioned in chapter four, against my eighteen requests sent to the international publishers, I received only two answers. Moreover, Seierstad’s Norwegian editor Heger did not reply to my messages, neither did her US editor, nor the CO of Cappelen Damm. The reasons for their silence can be multiple: they might have missed my email, been on a holiday when I contacted them, or they might have been too busy. Maybe Heger deleted by mistake the voice mail I left in his mobile phone. Who knows? One person in Norway who wanted to defend Heger’s behaviour to me said that he is a very busy person. It might be true, but the same could easily apply to journalists, academics, and NGO workers – still a majority of them replied. And even if publishers were busier than the rest of us, is that not itself a problem? If publishers do not have time to respond to feedback or to questions coming from researchers the way journalists or other academics have, does that not constitute a risk for literature’s ability to interact with the society?

Unlike newspapers, magazines, radio channels and internet forums, books do not have established or institutionalised mechanisms for feedback. Letters to the editor, or the practice of calling to a radio show, and commentary buttons in the internet, are all means which make these media at least somehow responsive to their audiences.¹⁶³ Books lack these mechanisms, which puts them in a different position. They are more unidirectional, and practices such as copyrights guarantee that the message may not be altered according to the wishes of the users/readers. The case of *The Bookseller of Kabul* demonstrated where the lack of these mechanisms may lead. A skilful use of paratexts can strengthen the unidirectional flow of messages: the family's post-controversy comments did not find their way to the object, unlike Seierstad's. The family's interventions did not enter the object, even if their views were widely discussed in public. And copyrights prevented Rais from modifying the text – and enabled Seierstad to denounce any such plans. This is what I mean by saying that books – as an institutionalised form of communication – can easily be used against other forms of communication.

The court case made Seierstad economically answerable and responsible for her decisions, but the book did not need to answer or reply to the challenges or accusations made by different critics. The book kept on proliferating happily in the form the author and her publishers wanted it to. This is possible because the author had the copyrights, and because it is in the nature of commodities to circulate on the market, especially in the era of free trade. Freedom of expression, consolidated by legal institutions, also protects the book from most accusations. For one reason or another, these premises and principles were not called into question by the plaintiff. Maybe they were not challenged because of their firm position in Western societies.

(2) In other words, this introverted and non-responsive nature of publishing is intertwined with the fact that for the most part books are commodities sold on the market.¹⁶⁴ And this commodified form of existence brings with it other problems when observed from the global perspective.

There was something in the logics of the globally circulating *The Bookseller of Kabul* which produced the book in a similar fashion around the globe. The pictures of the author and the veiled women on the covers, were patterns reproduced by different actors. Blurbs, and

¹⁶³ This does, of course, not mean that these practices and instruments would be unproblematic or allow some kind of unmediated communication.

¹⁶⁴ Naturally, following Appadurai (1986) and Kopytoff (1986), after a book has been purchased it is not necessarily conceived as a commodity anymore. But my point here is to discuss that phase in the biography of the book when it is produced for and exchanged in the market.

information on the author occupied the covers of the book regardless of the country. The veiled women appeared on the covers of paperbacks, which can be conceived as books that use “safe” covers. In some cases the cover designers – who had often not read the book – explained their choices by referring directly to customers and selling strategies. Thus, the economic needs and marketing strategies seemed to steer the book to a direction which was very much in tune with the existing frames and tropes of representing Afghans. The actions of these different actors around the book were formed above all in relation to elements outside the literary text.

This logic was further enforced by practices falling under the above discussed promoter function. As mentioned, it looks as if a new type of a function, a promoter function, is gaining strength in the literary world. The actors fulfilling this function give publicity for only those books they like. Their approach is meant to be uncritical, and the purpose of their work is to sell books and promote the actor her/himself. In the case of *The Bookseller of Kabul*, Richard & Judy’s Book Club performed this function, as well as for example the reviewer for *The Guardian*. These messages easily find their way to the object, thus fulfilling the promoting function also with the help of the materiality of the book. Blurbs and later paratexts contribute to this phenomenon, which obscures the line between marketing and criticism, making literary criticism “part of the public relations branch of literary industry”, as Eagleton (2000, 7) has noted. A noteworthy detail here is how the blurbs in different countries often derived from the same Anglo-American papers, thus, spreading more widely those interpretations produced in the global political and economical centres than others.

Subsequently, literary critics, and other institutions supporting literature, do not only serve potential readers by providing judgements, but also enforce each other’s strength, promoting the sole practice of reading. This promotion is increasingly done without making evaluations of what is worth reading (whatever the criteria for this would be). Similarly, the economic support given for *The Bookseller of Kabul* by the state funded NORLA can be described as an instrument, the function of which is only to promote. As mentioned, it supports 95 per cent of the received applications, and is thus a mechanism which enforces, more or less automatically, the international circulation of Norwegian books.

(3) The promoting function might be gaining strength – at the expense of evaluative literary criticism – also because publishers are often owned by media conglomerates. When a conglomerate owns not only publishers, but also those newspapers, radio and TV-stations, and magazines which are supposed to facilitate and produce public debate on books, we need to raise questions about the independence of these actors. The same applies for bookshops or film houses owned by media conglomerates: do they give equal amount of publicity and visibility for books by different publishers?

In the case of *The Bookseller of Kabul*, it seems that the centralised ownership did influence at least Shah Muhammed Rais' role as a public figure. As described in chapter three, at one point all his main alliances with media institutions were formed with Egmont, and these alliances have broken since Seierstad's publisher became part of Egmont. When the conditions of literary production and reception are increasingly being set up by media conglomerates, there are good reasons to state that the possibilities for individual books to create consequences also have to be read in relation to these actors. Subsequently, certain concepts and practices, such as literary criticism and literary value, should also be read as effects of a wide network, not simply as results of the encounters between the text and its readers.

(4) And finally, the more abstract reasons to hesitate in front of unreserved celebration of literature includes its ideological or symbolic role in liberal societies – as discussed previously in relation to Žižek. What if the freedom of literature helps to mask another set of unfreedoms – such as the freedom to move, or the freedom to live in a peaceful country? In the case of *The Bookseller of Kabul*, visa practices and border control obviously put the different parties of the controversy in unequal positions in terms of their freedoms or rights. But still the freedom which gained the most attention in media, and in the court, was the freedom of expression. The freedom of literature sometimes stands against other freedoms and rights. The court had to navigate inside these frames – which placed the author's freedom of expression through literature against the right for privacy. The judgement was ambiguous in this respect: even if it ordered the author and the publisher to pay compensations because of some incorrect statements in the book, in the end, it acknowledged the importance of the book for the public debate and ratified the author's freedom of expression.

As mentioned, the points made above about the closed nature of publishing, the centralised ownership, and the ideological importance of literature should be understood as elements of *power*. Throughout my thesis I have looked at power not as an external relation, but as something which is immanent in all forms of relations and in the alliances between actors. If we handle and analyse all these relations together, we receive a rather gloomy picture of the abilities of *The Bookseller of Kabul* to escape the global power inequalities – and in the end, the frames of war.

This grim picture might have gained brighter tones, if this thesis had included more thorough research on readers. However, approaching the social relations of the readers to the object – in my case, to the different editions of the book – would have required more research on reading experiences of individual readers. In order to say something meaningful about the readers, I should have looked, for example, at face-to-face reading groups and reading communities online. These readers might have used the book in subversive ways, making it break the frames of war. They could have convinced me that *The Bookseller of Kabul* was necessary and

that it managed to work against the hegemonic understanding of Afghanistan as a place where foreign troops need to be present. However, these views have been beyond the scope of my research, as I have mainly concentrated on those actors that have created associations in the public sphere (other than online), and on those languages that I have access to. Even if I admit that the gloominess might be a result of the fact that readers have not been discussed thoroughly in my thesis, I also want to question the (often postmodern) tendency to put too much subversive potential on the readers. This tendency has in many ways also characterised the tradition of cultural studies, with its emphasis on fandom culture, critical readings of popular culture and celebration of minorities. Appealing to the intelligence and independence of readers is often an easy way to escape the fact that producers are not taking the responsibility for the consequences of their work, or that journalists and critics are not questioning or challenging hegemonic readings. If only a few reviewers or commentators were able to spot the methodological and ethical problems of *The Bookseller of Kabul* without the family's intervention – why should we think a significant part of the readership would have done much better? This is a particularly challenging question because there are reasons to believe that most international readers did not know about the criticism raised by the family. Appealing to the intelligence of the readers often reminds me of the tendency to think that consumers and individuals can decide and make the difference for better – when politicians and industrialists can pollute, be corrupted, and not carry their responsibility. My claim that books should be approached more often as relational set of entities, or as processual networks, is meant to highlight the fact that *the power of individual readers is also relationally constructed*.

Reading differently, subversively or against the hegemonic interpretations is of course always possible, but the probabilities for these kind of readings, for example of *The Bookseller of Kabul* (either by the family or by individual readers), should be analysed in relation to the wider operations of the networks. For better or worse, subversive potentialities get either actualised or warded off relationally: if the majority of the actors, alliances and relations work against specific readings, is there really much reason to celebrate the potentialities of individual readers? My analysis has sought to describe how different procedures and their material embodiments (like peritexts and commentaries) can control reading, and marginalise certain interpretations. In my mind, closures in a network or in the biography of a book are important aspects for analysis, because they reveal how power operates in a theoretically open process of meaning making. With the help of my methods, I identified and described those social evaluations and interpretations of *The Bookseller of Kabul* that became most durable and powerful. Even if it is impossible to fully know or tell how books influence their readers (and also those who do not read), we should be able to make well-informed assumptions on

how books may operate as elements of power. This is best done, I believe, by following the trajectories of the book, and its changing relations to other actors.

Did it have to happen this way?

Listing these characteristics of the publishing industry and the literary institutions, and discussing them in relation to *The Bookseller of Kabul*, might make us feel that nothing could have happened differently, and that the book really lived a life of its own, as the author suggested (VG 15.01.05). However, my methodologies, through their dialogue with the ANT paradigm, hopefully encouraged to see also the potentialities for alternative developments. With my emphasis on transformations and alliances, I hoped to reveal how certain changes took place. Simultaneously, I tried to encourage my reader to see how fragile these transformations were. Only a tiny change in the alliances could have triggered significant transformations, or, on the contrary, prevented them from happening.

Based on my research, I want to conclude by proposing that there was not any single moment or any single act which made *The Bookseller of Kabul* suspicious in my eyes, and also in the eyes of many later commentators. No individual act of Seierstad, her publishers, nor those working around the book was by itself very dangerous or judgeable. There was no original sin, which would have resulted from the fall of the Author. On the contrary, Seierstad's and her publishers' behaviour constituted a chain of doubtful acts, which opened up a space for criticism – at least in the eyes of those concerned about global inequalities.

What were these acts, then? To start with, Seierstad chose to write a critical account of the family, and release it without their consent. She decided not to show the manuscript to the members of the family, thus compromising their rights as sources for her journalistic book. She did not anonymise the family adequately – thus perhaps putting them in physical danger, or at least in a difficult position in their local community. She and her Norwegian publisher disregarded the critical comments of the referee, and privately reproached those people who had criticised them in public. She was insensitive towards the Western political tendency to use women's rights as an argument in favour of the war – and did not at any point self-reflectively problematise her legitimacy as a spokesperson for women in Afghanistan. She decided to sell the book for the English-speaking markets, thus making the content available for millions of people, including many in Kabul. Even if in the court room she and her publisher testified that the success of the book took them by surprise, they both worked actively to make it happen. The controversial consequences of these decisions might have been difficult to predict, and Seierstad might have made the decisions out of sheer thoughtlessness, but the way the controversy has been handled, indicates that many decisions have also been the results of a deliberate wish to control other actors. In the public controversy, Seierstad

certainly did not fully take into account her privileged position in the global public spheres as a citizen of Norway and as a national celebrity, but on the contrary, she made rather naïve comments about each of them writing their own book and allowing the readers to judge between them. She used interviews in international newspapers to repeatedly denounce the family. She decided to sell the book to as many countries as possible, without taking into consideration the criticism and the uncomfortable feelings of the family. She and/or her publisher added biased annexes – such as the reading group guide and her interview – to the US paperback. In the media, she stressed the importance of the removals – suggesting that the insulting passages had been removed, even though only few sentences had been deleted. Furthermore, she was not willing to admit that she might have hurt or endangered the family. Neither did she want to give any part of her profits to the family – on the contrary she stated that the book is hers, and Rais may not modify it. And so on, and so forth. If all this is simply part of producing transparent and truthful representations of people in Afghanistan, what would be required for a biased political manifesto?

Listing these decisions in negative light might look outrageous and unconscionable – after all, the family also made the case very difficult and acted in ways that can be called opportunistic. But nevertheless, I want to use the list in order to show that there were moments when things could have been done in a different way.

After doing my research, I have a strong belief (indeed, it might only be a belief) that the case of *The Bookseller of Kabul* could have unfolded differently – even if we acknowledge the existence of something like an apparatus with its orientations toward certain ends and purposes. My extended notion of the book, and my approach, hopefully underlined the view that there were several moments when decisions were made, and these decisions could have been different. The existing frames of the war in Afghanistan could have been challenged, but this was hardly done. This is why I do not believe that the quest of making women's lives better in Afghanistan advanced with the help of Seierstad's book. On the contrary.

Enabling things to unfold differently would require self-reflection from us, who produce and distribute meanings in the West: from journalists, authors, researchers, publishers, and literary reviewers. We who have privileged access to the instruments of the meaning making processes play a role in global inequalities. I say we, because I want to emphasise that the task should not be let only to individual readers, nor to angry Afghans.

Even at the risk of sounding old fashioned, I want to conclude by recalling Walter Benjamin's (1970, 7) single demand to the writer, as it seems to be in place today more than ever: "the demand of *reflecting*, of thinking about his [sic] position in the process of production."

According to Benjamin (1970), solidarity in a struggle cannot take place only on the ideological level, but the writer has to show solidarity also as a producer. In his vocabulary, this means that the writer needs to work as an engineer working towards changing the apparatus of production. Translated into the language of our days – and my case – this would mean the demand to reflect one’s privileged position inside the publishing and distribution processes of books, vis-à-vis those people one wants to save, help or give voice to. As one of my Norwegian informants, Unni Rustad, said in the interview about Seierstad and her book: “If you think in Afghanistan there is a very oppressive system, and you say that you are writing in solidarity with women, then be very careful! Protect the women. Don’t use your pen to make their lives even more vulnerable!” (Rustad 05.03.09.)

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Abbreviations:

AP = Aftenposten (Norwegian newspaper)
VG = Verdens Gang (Norwegian newspaper)
DB = Dagbladet (Norwegian newspaper)
BT = Bergens Tidende (Norwegian newspaper)
HS = Helsingin Sanomat (Finnish newspaper)

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1:

INTERACTING WITH THE INFORMANTS

In the last instance, it is also relevant to ask whether I have been loyal to my sources. Did I treat them well, or did I instrumentalize them for my research purposes? This question came to my mind when I had to decide whether my informants should be able to check the quotes I use. The question had special relevance, because the case itself invites to ask what kind of responsibility an author has to ensure that the sources approve the text. Thus, I asked myself what happens if I do not contact my informants? The question was not that much of legal than of moral nature: I was afraid of doing the same as that for which Seierstad has been criticised.

Still, I decided not to contact them systematically. The reasons are not categorically different from those of Seierstad, but I hope to convince that there are differences in degree. I personally think that her decision not to show the manuscript to the family is not what caused the controversy. If a text is written so that it shows awareness of the circumstances of its production and reception, it will most likely be acceptable also for those whose testimonies it uses. Thus, it is not simply a question of letting the sources read the text beforehand, but a question of respecting them throughout the writing process. Writing about other people's opinions is always a risk, but the riskiness of this affair can be diminished, if the complexity of the task is self-reflectively taken into account. In the end, it was also partly my method which steered the decision. At the time when I was thinking of contacting the informants, some of them had disappeared already. The email addresses were not working anymore, or the people did not answer my emails.

I also felt that the citations I use are not very sensitive in nature. I had recorded all the interviews (except for two). Hence, there could not be much disagreement about what the informants had said. On the other hand, if there was any reason why the informants wanted to withdraw their statements, it would be because they did not want to say publicly their controversial opinions. But most of them already had – that was the reason I contacted them in the first place. Moreover, if the idea was to protect the informants from other people who had interest in the case (or who belonged to the same intellectual elite in Norway), I could not have sent the whole manuscript to all the informants. That way they could have read each others opinions already in my manuscript. Then again, without seeing the context of the quotations, why would anyone want to withdraw them? It did not make any sense to send individual quotations for the informants to check, and neither could I send the whole manuscript to all the

people I had contacted. Moreover, it was quite unlikely that these people would have taken the time to read my text through.

Consequently, I decided not to contact all the informants. After all, they had all told their opinions in a formal interview situation. I thought that my digital recorder had made the social bonds between me and my informants durable enough. There is, however, no clear solution to the question concerning the research ethics. Nobody could tell me what to do – just as nobody could tell Seierstad what she should do. However, I have tried to write my thesis in a manner which shows awareness of these ethical issues. For example, when I felt that a specific quotation might be awkward for the interviewee, I cited it anonymously. But of course, in the end, it is my readers (both those who have participated in my research and those who have not), who can judge my ethics.

Appendix 2:

THE BOOK IN THE COURT

After having worked on the case of *The Bookseller of Kabul* for about four years, on 14th of June 2010 I entered the court room in Oslo District Court. The court case between Suraia Rais and Åsne Seierstad was finally due to begin. Rais had sued Seierstad two years earlier on 3rd of June 2008. Between June 2008 and June 2010 different Norwegian courts had made several decisions related to the case: On 2.4.2009 it was decided that the plaintiff does not have to give economic guarantees in case she loses – unlike the defenders had required. On 2.12.2009 the supreme court confirmed the decisions made on other court levels that the case will be judged according to Norwegian laws – against the request of the plaintiff who had demanded that Afghan laws should be applied. On 28.01.2010 it was decided that different family members cannot be represented at once, and finally on 14.4.2010 came a decision that in the June trial only Suraia Rais' claims would be handled. (Oslo Tingrett 2010.) Mainly due to these open questions, the trial had been postponed already twice: it was supposed to take place first in May 2009 and then in November 2009.

But in June 2010 everything was ready, even if also then the plaintiff had plead for postponement because one of their testifiers had not wanted to testify in Kabul. The trial lasted for two and a half days (14.–16.06.2010), and only few people attended it. In addition to the judge, present were the plaintiff, her lawyer, and her husband as a witness, and at the side of the defence were Seierstad, a representative of Cappelen Damm, their lawyer and his assistant. Also two translators took part, translating between a Persian dialect and Norwegian. Every now and then there were two to three people in the audience, Seierstad's mother, brother and a friend, but no journalists followed the trial. I was in the audience during the whole time.

The trial consisted of lawyers' speeches, judge's questions, and four testimonies by Seierstad, Suraia Rais, Shah Muhammed Rais and Cappelen Damm's representative Ida Berntsen. No transcripts exist, but I took notes and recorded the trial. The judgement (Oslo Tingrett 2010) given on 23rd of July in 2010 also summarises rather well what was discussed in the court. In the following, I will describe the trial as I understood it, and as it is presented in the judgement (Oslo Tingrett 2010). As I am not trained in legal matters, nor familiar with legal discourse, my account below approaches the court case from the perspective of a layman. It tries to describe how the book got discussed in the court and which details were highlighted – without giving much weight to the specificities of the juridical discourse.

What happened in the court room...?

The reason for the proceeding was that the plaintiff demanded both Cappelen Damm and Seierstad to pay her compensations for the *global* damages the book had caused.¹⁶⁵ The size of the compensations was left for the court to decide, and the plaintiff also demanded the defendants to pay the costs of the juridical process. The defendants disavowed the claims entirely. (Oslo Tingrett 2010, 6–8.)

In the allegations, the plaintiff concentrated on false or distorted passages in the book. According to the plaintiff, the legal dispute would need to balance between the right to free speech and the right to privacy. (Oslo Tingrett 2010, 6.) In the plaintiff's opinion, in her case, privacy should be foregrounded because of negligence by the author. Negligence is generally defined as a conduct that is culpable because it falls short of what a reasonable person would do to protect another individual from foreseeable risks of harm. According to the plaintiff, Seierstad showed negligence because she did not obtain consent for the use of Suraia Rais' statements, nor for her photograph on the covers of the UK editions. Furthermore, Seierstad had not adequately anonymised the family, and should have understood that in the internet age the book will be known in Afghanistan and cause harm for the family. However, according to the plaintiff, not only the author should have shown more diligence, but even more so, the publisher could be accused of negligence. (Oslo Tingrett 2010, 6–7.) The plaintiff noted that the passages on pages 21, 22, 77, 186 and 187 of the Norwegian edition, as well as the picture of her on the cover of the English edition, were the primary violations of her privacy. Moreover, also that which can be read between the lines was said to be relevant.

The first passage highlighted by the plaintiff refers to Sultan's (Shah Muhammed Rais') proposal for Sonya's (Suraia's) parents.¹⁶⁶ According to the book, Sultan offered money, food and animals to the parents in exchange for the bride.¹⁶⁷ According to the plaintiff, this passage

¹⁶⁵ When I refer to the plaintiff – it basically means the argumentation presented by Suraia Rais' lawyer Per Danielsen. When I refer to Suraia Rais in person, I use her name.

¹⁶⁶ In the judgement the highlighted passages were cited in Norwegian, but I quote them in the footnotes the way they appear in the UK translation.

¹⁶⁷ "Sultan returned the third day and this time he made known the suitor's proposition: a ring, a necklace, earrings and bracelet, all in red gold; as many clothes as she wanted; 300 kilos of rice, 150 kilos of cooking-oil, a cow, a few sheep and 15 million Afghani, approximately £300. / Sonya's father was more than satisfied with the price and asked to meet this mysterious man who was prepared to pay so much for his daughter." (Seierstad 2004a, 13–14.) According to the plaintiff, the Norwegian word

contained a misunderstanding. The gifts and the money were not a bride price, but supposed to be used to cover the wedding costs. Moreover, it was not about a cow and a sheep, but about meat for the wedding. (Oslo Tingrett, 7.) The second allegedly offending passage describes Sonya's reactions to the proposal, suggesting that she was paralyzed by fear and petrified.¹⁶⁸ According to the plaintiff, the passage contained several mistakes. It was incorrect to say that she had not wanted to marry her husband. Neither was it correct that she had cried and been paralysed by fear. (Oslo Tingrett 2010, 7.) The third quoted passage suggests that Sonya was mistreated by the other members of the family when Sultan was away.¹⁶⁹ The plaintiff noted that also this was incorrect. (Oslo Tingrett, 7.) The fourth passage discusses the time before Sultan's and Sonya's wedding. According to the text, Sonya had cried before the wedding, and she had spent some time and a night together with Sultan during their engagement, which had led Sonya's brother to threaten Sultan with a knife. According to the passage, Sultan had silenced both the brother and the parents by paying them.¹⁷⁰ The plaintiff saw that also this passage included several mistakes. Suraia did not cry before the wedding. The parents and the brother were not bribed, and neither did the brother want to attack Sultan. Also the impression that the couple would have had sexual intercourse before the wedding is incorrect. (Oslo Tingrett 2010, 7.) The final passage, foregrounded by the plaintiff, concerns her forthcoming children. The book states that "[t]he most important thing on Sonya's mind is to have children, or rather,

brudeprisen (bride price) refers more clearly to the idea that the money and the gifts were paid to the family in exchange for the woman.

¹⁶⁸ "Not a sound escaped Sonya's lips. With tearful eyes and bowed head, she hid behind her long shawl. / 'Your parents have accepted the suitor,' her uncle said. 'Now is your only chance to express an opinion.' / She was petrified, paralysed by fear. She did not want the man but she knew she had to obey her parents. As Sultan's wife her standing in Afghan society would go up considerably. The bride oney would solve many of her family's problems. The money would help her parents buy good wives for their sons. / Sonya held her tongue, and with that her fate was sealed. To say nothing means to give one's consent. The agreement was drawn up, the date fixed." (Seierstad 2004a, 14–15.)

¹⁶⁹ "She [Sonya] misses Sultan terribly when he is away. The other members of the family do not treat her so well when he is not there. Then she is no longer mistress of the house, just someone who has dropped in by chance. Suddenly others are in charge and they do what they like when Sultan is absent. 'Peasant-girl', they call her. 'Stupid as an ass!' (Seierstad 2004a, 70.)

¹⁷⁰ "Sonya had made the transition from child to wife when she was sixteen. She cried before the wedding, but like a well-behaved girl, she soon got used to the idea. She had grown up without any expectations from life and Sultan had used the two-month-long period of engagement to his advantage. He had bribed her parents to enable him to spend time alone with Sonya before the wedding. The engaged couple are not supposed to see each other between the engagement party and the wedding day, a custom rarely observed. But it was one thing to go shopping together, quite another to spend nights together. That was unheard of. Her big brother wanted to defend her honour with a knife when he learnt that Sultan had paid the parents money to be allowed to stay overnight before the wedding night. But Sonya's indignant brother, too, was silenced with ready cash and Sultan got his way. In his eyes he did her a favour." (Seierstad 2004a, 182.)

sons. She is pregnant again and terrified it will be another daughter.” (Seierstad 2004a, 183.) According to the plaintiff, she was not terrified of having a daughter. On the contrary, both she and her husband hoped to have a girl. Moreover, the judgement summarizes the arguments of the plaintiff by saying: “Although this is not the most sensitive and offensive statement, it supports the image of Rais [Suraia] as a woman without her own opinions, as someone who is controlled by men, and who is considered as stupid by others.”^{lviii} (Oslo Tingrett, 7.)

The author and the publisher disclaimed all the charges and declared themselves not guilty. According to them, freedom of speech can be restricted only if weighty considerations give reason for it, or if there is “a pressing social need”. Neither of these apply to the book. They defended their views by stating that the book is of general interest and important in terms of public discussion. The defendants said that Afghanistan in general, and women’s situation in particular, are important issues in the news, and Seierstad’s book gave the first inside picture of the country. They reminded that the book has aroused interest inside the academia, it is part of the curricula in several universities, and it is of high literary value. It has also received several awards. According to the defendants, the family also knew that Seierstad lived with them because of a book project, and the book is based on what the family members themselves have told. (Oslo Tingrett, 8–9.) Furthermore, the defendants noted that the possibility that the book would cause harm for Suraia Rais, who is a minor character in the text, is minimal – also because the English edition is read only by intellectuals in Afghanistan, and the defendants cannot be held responsible for the pirate edition in Dari. (Oslo Tingrett, 9–10.) According to the defendants, the publisher and the author cannot be accused of negligence because neither of them foresaw the book’s success, nor its translation into English. Moreover, as far as the image of Suraia Rais as a person is concerned, in the book she is not described in negative terms but rather with sympathy as a victim, they said. (Oslo Tingrett, 10.)

What should one make out of these arguments? Do they adequately reflect the controversy discussed in the first parts of this chapter? Did the court case cover the essential points of disagreement? My answer is no, not really. What was noteworthy in the legal proceeding, is that it truly concerned only Suraia Rais’ claims. As a consequence, probably the most controversial aspects of the book were not discussed in the court – as they concern other people, mainly Shah Muhammed Rais. In that sense, the court case gives a very specific picture of the problems *The Bookseller of Kabul* raised as a public controversy. As such, it should not be read as a comprehensive account of what the critics contended in the book. Moreover, the issues highlighted in a court room are not necessarily those which are most hurtful or controversial – but rather those which can best be used as arguments inside the juridical context. Furthermore, as the trial was not followed by any journalists, and as its content did not come public in any other way than through the summary given in the

judgement, the argumentation used in the court room did not play a very central role in the actor-network around the book.

Still, I have found it indispensable to discuss the case shortly in this thesis – not least because I assume my readers expect it. Above, I described the trial mainly on the basis of the judgement, which naturally expresses only one version of the court case. In the following, I offer some additional impressions and reveal how I myself experienced the trial.

...and how it happened?

What the judgement did not reveal was the specific ways the testimonies were carried forward. In the following, I take up from the trial a few examples, which are of special interest for my research. They concern firstly the ways in which literary value and political support for the book were argued for. Secondly, I refer briefly to the alleged consequences of the book, as they were discussed in the trial. And thirdly, I discuss procedural issues, such as the role of translators, literacy and notebooks. After that I discuss the judgement and my interpretation of its significance.

On the first day of the trial Seierstad's lawyer, Schiøtz, argued in favour of the book by appealing to its literary value (on 14.06.10 in the Oslo District Court). The lawyer tried to prove this by quoting reviews in non-Norwegian newspapers and magazines. All the quotations used by Schiøtz had appeared as blurbs either in the UK (Seierstad 2004a) or US paperback edition (Seierstad 2004a). These blurbs derived from *The Sunday Times*, *The Scotsman*, *The Literary Review* and *The Daily Mail*.¹⁷¹ Following very much the logics of blurbs, the lawyer referred to only those parts of the reviews – or even of the blurbs – which presented the book in a purely positive and uncontroversial light. For example, when referring to *The Scotsman's* review, which appeared in the UK edition, the lawyer quoted the following part: "[the] work's outward simplicity is matched by a subtle and complex understanding: the quality of truth." (Seierstad 2004a, the unnumbered second page). He did not quote that part of the blurb which referred to intimacy: "while their stories delight with the freshness of something foreign, they are both universal and intimately personal." (Ibid.) The main charge against the author and the publisher was invasion of privacy. Maybe because of this, the reference to the "intimately personal" as one of the important factors of the book's success, did not find its way to the argumentation of the defendants.

¹⁷¹ In chapter four, I discuss more thoroughly blurbs as elements in the conflict. Here it is sufficient to note that one more actor brought forward the same messages which had appeared also in the objects.

In the context of this research, it is interesting how the defendants used the concept of literary value to argue in favour of the book – even if the whole defence was based on the claim that the book was factual. For me, this reads as an argument which tries to convince that a difference between valuable literary discourse and other forms of communication should be acknowledged by the court. Consequently, a book with so-called “literary value” should have more freedoms than a book without that value.¹⁷² It might even suggest that the harm caused by a book with literary value is somehow less judgeable than the harm caused by a book without this value. It is also noteworthy that the literary value of the book was defined through Anglo-American reviews. The media texts from the two leading war countries, the USA and the UK, were offered as proofs of the literary quality of the book, in the same way that they were utilised in the public debates (discussed in previous subchapters).

Seierstad’s own testimony drew a further link between the praise the book had received and the political discourse of the war. As mentioned, Seierstad testified that she had received thank you letters from Laura Bush and Tony Blair (on 15.6.2010 in Oslo District Court). This showed, according to the author, that there existed very wide general interest for the book, but it can also be interpreted in the context described in my interlude I. Women’s rights have been used as an argument in favour of the war, and for example Laura Bush explicitly engaged herself in this task in 2001. The joke by the Norwegian anthropologist Signe Howell, quoted in interlude I, proved out to be more correct than she would have thought. Moreover, in her testimony Seierstad referred several times to a book called *Des Femmes d’Afghanistan* written by Isabelle Delloye (first published in 1980, and re-launched in 2002). According to Seierstad, she had used this book as her source when writing about Afghan traditions – thus, acknowledging that when writing her own book she had had discursive preconceptions which were very tightly linked to one specific book, and not to her own understanding of the culture. Moreover, that Delloye’s book was written already in 1980 suggests that Seierstad did not think that Afghanistan and the situation of women in the country could have changed in very significant ways during two decades. Delloye’s book is a good example of Latour’s (2000, 1991) claim that objects stabilize social relations: the book has disseminated a specific representation of Afghanistan for 30 years already, and transported it to the hands of a Norwegian journalist, who transformed some of its claims into a new book, which now proliferates widely.

¹⁷² Whatever is meant by literary value...

The trial touched also upon the consequences of the book – in other words, one of my main interest in this thesis. In the court, the consequences were discussed in a very concrete manner. In their testimonies, both Suraia Rais and her husband saw that the book had seriously effected the family. They claimed that as a result of the book the family had had to scatter around the globe. According to Suraia Rais, the family sent one of her daughters to Canada, in order to keep her safe. Shah Muhammed Rais testified that, as a result of Seierstad's book, the family now has enemies. Having enemies is dangerous in a country where for example children's organs are sold on the market, said Shah Muhammed Rais, and also the plaintiff referred to the organ trade. Moreover, Shah Muhammed Rais testified that he had received threats, which were sent because of the book. However, no evidence whatsoever was given to support these claims. These consequences were very concrete, but difficult to prove, or – to be more precise – those who referred to them did not even try to prove them, which of course questions the reliability of the claims. On the other hand, it might be difficult to give a clear articulation for the reasons why parents send their child to another country, as reasons may be multiple and concern subjective fears rather than verifiable facts. However, there was also another set of consequences, which Shah Muhammed Rais brought forward, and which was less controversial. He testified that several family members had cut their relations to him and his family – thus referring to physically less dangerous but more emotional consequences.¹⁷³

The trial included several small interesting aspects, and it revealed many differences in the ways in which the two parties understood what had happened. Suraia Rais for example testified that she had never given her consent to the book project and not even discussed with Seierstad, whereas Seierstad testified that she had taken good care that the whole family understood and agreed with her project. Both, however, agreed that Suraia Rais had not directly discussed with Seierstad, because they did not share a common language. Suraia Rais also said she never gave her consent to the use of the picture in the cover of the book, whereas Seierstad said that everyone had understood why the photographs were taken.

However, the most essential aspect my observations bear witness to concerns perhaps the different abilities of the two parties to bring forward their case. These non-discursive abilities

¹⁷³ The difficulty to define or prove inside a legal context, whether a book has caused certain consequences, or not, has been central also for another case concerning Seierstad's books. Hadizat Gatajeva, the main character in Seierstad's book on Chechnya, *The Angel of Grozny*, has had serious problems with the authorities in Lithuania and she has been sentenced to prison. In 2009, she applied for a political asylum in Finland. It is open for interpretations, whether Seierstad's book – and the fame it brought for Gatajeva – was a cause for the Lithuanian authorities to act against Gatajeva. The case is, however, too complex to disclose here, but it shares certain characteristics with that of the bookseller.

cannot be read from the judgement, they can be described only as my own impressions. The significant differences between the two parties concerned their language skills and their level of literacy. First of all, the court case was held in Norwegian, but translated simultaneously to a Persian dialect. The translators, however, seemed to have problems with their task, which often led to misunderstandings, less detailed accounts, or shortened versions of the testimonies. When Shah Muhammed Rais wanted to use English in his testimony, the option was denied by the judge. He was forced to use the translation, even if he did not find it adequate or reliable. But even more so, it was maybe the question of literacy, which put the two parties in unequal positions in front of the court. Suraia Rais is illiterate, which made it challenging for her to make detailed accusations over a book she could not read.¹⁷⁴ Moreover, she had difficulties remembering exactly what had happened in 2002, when Seierstad lived with the family. In contrast, Seierstad used her notebooks to evoke the past – a practice unavailable to someone who cannot read or write. The judge also asked Seierstad to read aloud the texts in her notebooks. The notebooks had made Seierstad's impressions more durable than Suraia Rais' memories, and they mediated Seierstad's interpretations for the judge. Unlike *The Bookseller of Kabul*, these notebooks were approached as evidences or proofs – not as a contested discourse. Whatever the final impact of the notebooks for the judgement was, the fact that they were used in the trial demonstrates beautifully how objects participate in trials of strength, and how they also put different parties in strangely unequal positions.

In short, for me the trial appeared as a bizarre event in which an illiterate woman was testifying, on the basis of her memories, and with the help of unreliable translators, against a book and notebooks she had not read. In contrast, the defendant could read all the material that was available, evoke past events by relying on her notebooks and speak directly to the judge in their common language without further human or technological mediation.

Everyone to whom I talked in Oslo – and to whom I had talked previously – had held the same opinion as me: Seierstad would win the case. Deep down I had drafted my thesis in a way which acknowledged this end result before it had actually taken place. I had been angry and frustrated about the institutional inabilities and impotencies to make literature accountable and responsible for the consequences it may have on individuals who do not read or write books. Thus, I did not have high hopes for the result, when the Oslo District Court gave its decision on 23rd of July 2010. This is why, in the middle of my summer holiday, I was taken by the biggest surprise during my research when I learned that the Norwegian judge Jannicke

¹⁷⁴ Her Norwegian teacher had read aloud parts of the book to her, but she was not familiar with the entire book.

Johannesen had decided in favour of Suraia Rais (Oslo tingrett 2010). Johannesen overruled most of the charges, but she nevertheless found enough grounds to convict Seierstad and her publisher.

According to the judgement, freedom of expression would have overridden the right for privacy, if the information in the book had been fully grounded on the testimonies of the family – especially since the theme of the book was of general interest, and since the family had collaborated with the author. However, the judgement noted that Seierstad had made mistakes. She had falsely written that Suraia Rais was terrified of giving birth to a daughter, and that she had not wanted to marry her husband. Moreover, as Suraia Rais was not a public figure, the argument that the book had general interest had insufficient grounds. (Oslo Tingrett 2010, 7, 22–23.)¹⁷⁵

The judgement stated that the information about Suraia Rais' thoughts and feelings in the book was sensitive. It was attributed on her as truth, and Seierstad and Cappelen Damm cannot be said to have acted in good faith to ensure that the information was correct and accurate. Suraia Rais was not one of Seierstad's sources, and she cannot be said to have contributed to the information. Moreover, dissemination of such information could easily affect Suraia Rais' relationship with the family and the outside world.^{lx} The publisher could also be identified with negligence, because it had relied solely on the information Seierstad had given, and had not done any research on whether the book was based on the family's testimonies, as the author claimed.^{lx} (Oslo Tingrett 2010, 24.) The judge also noted that the fact the case involves economic profit was meaningful (Oslo Tingrett 2010, 25). On the basis of these points Seierstad was ordered to pay 125 000 kroner (approximately 15 700 euros on 11.08.2010) to Suraia Rais. Cappelen Damm was ordered to pay the same amount. The question over the coverage of the legal fees was left open.

One way to approach the meaning of the court case would be to call it an obligatory passage point, a concept designed by Callon (1986b) and used by many ANT-scholars. An obligatory passage point refers to a point or a situation that needs to be passed, in order for the actors to

¹⁷⁵ This question of general interest may be contrasted with another legal case, on which Seierstad's lawyer, Cato Schiøtz, has worked. Schiøtz has represented Norway's princess Martha Louise in a court case which attempted to halt the sales of a book, because it carries her photograph on its cover. According to *Aftenposten* (AP 02.10.07), Cato Schiøtz, accused the publisher "of being 'cynical parasites' and exploiting the princess' name and goodwill". The newspaper states that "Schiøtz argued in court that since Princess Martha Louise never granted permission for use of her photo on the book, its publication violates Norwegian laws on intellectual property, privacy and marketing". This case works as an interesting parallel to that of *The Bookseller of Kabul*: both the argumentation and the circumstances share a lot in common, but in the case of Martha Louise, Cato Schiøtz was representing the side of the plaintiff.

satisfy the interests that have been attributed to them. Obligatory passage points get formed when actors realise (for better or worse) that there is a point they need to pass to receive their goals. The court proceeding constituted such a moment. If family Rais wanted to receive some form of compensation, atonement, or even revenge, the court room seemed to be an indispensable place. Since private negotiations and conciliation between the author and the family had not satisfied the family, the court remained one of the few ways to make the author accountable – and receive money.

The prospect of a court case was also a passage point, which received much attention beforehand in the media (even if journalists did not follow the trial) – reflecting maybe an attitude that in a modern society disputes and conflicts can, and should be, solved in the court room, also when books are concerned. Moreover, the relative unsuccessfulness of the family to make the media texts resonate with their critical views, suggested that the court might be a better place to proceed in the conflict than, for example, the media. An obligatory passage point becomes reality when actors think “they cannot attain what they want by themselves” (Callon 1986b, 206) – and this seemed to be the case for the family. In return, for Seierstad the court was obligatory not only because she was sued – and thus had to go to the court – but also because she had decided to write the book in a manner that was open for contestation and because she had not agreed with the family’s demands outside the court room.

Moreover, the court case seemed to be an obligatory passage point for me as well. Because I wanted to collect information about the possible consequences of the book and its trajectories (as well as about the mechanisms behind them), I could not disregard the trial. However, I am slightly sceptical about the importance of the court case in general. In the end, the trial did not constitute a very powerful moment in the events I have been following and describing.

Appendix 3

THE QUESTIONNAIRE SENT TO COVER DESIGNERS

Dear _____,

Thanks for your willingness to participate. Some of my questions are rather general, but few of them concern specifically your cover. I hope they are not too many, and you'll find the time to get back to me. Here are my questions:

1. In your opinion, how important it is in general to change the covers of an international book to match the local reality?
2. What kind of message(s) did you want to bring forward with the cover of *The Bookseller of Kabul*? Can you recall or describe some of the ideas, motives, and thoughts you had when designing it?
3. The cover you designed is rather different from the first Norwegian cover. Can you describe some reasons for this?
4. Can you give some reasons for choosing that specific picture for the cover? What did it represent for you?
5. Do you know whether the picture had been taken in Afghanistan? Did that have any importance for you?
6. Did you read the book before making the cover, or did you get the knowledge of the content from other sources or from the publisher?
7. By the time you designed your cover, do you remember having seen other covers (from other countries)? In other words, did you use them as a point of comparison or contrast when making your own cover?
8. Do you remember the publisher having some specific wishes regarding the cover?
9. Your cover does not include the subtitle "Ett familjedrama" unlike the first Norwegian edition. Do you remember/know why it is so?
10. I assume that by the time you were asked to design the cover/you designed it, the controversy between Åsne Seierstad and family Rais had already started. Did this have any effect on your work? Did you have it in your mind in a way or another?

I'm very delighted if you have the time to answer my questions. Your cover forms an essential and interesting part of the data I am analyzing in my research. Thank you very much, and have nice day.

Best regards,
Hanna

Appendix 4

THE MESSAGES SENT TO FACEBOOK-USERS

Dear _____,

I noticed at the Facebook's LivingSocial:Books -application that you have read Åsne Seierstad's book *The Bookseller of Kabul*. I am myself writing a PhD thesis on the book, and would like to ask whether you would like to take part in my research and answer some questions about your reading experience. The survey is part of my PhD research in Cultural Studies, which I pursue at Goldsmiths College, University of London.

The questionnaire includes some 10 questions, and you are free to answer as broadly or as shortly as you wish. The information I collect will be used only for the purpose of my PhD research.

For practical reasons, I would prefer sending the questionnaire via e-mail, but using Facebook is also an option. If you choose to use e-mail, please send me a mail to hanna.r.kuusela@gmail.com conforming your interest, or if you prefer Facebook, just reply to this message.

I am looking forward to hearing from you, as your experiences can offer me valuable information on readers attitudes. And I am of course happy to give any further information on my research, if you wish.

All the best,
Hanna Kuusela

After receiving an answer, I sent the following questionnaire:

Dear _____,

Thank you for your willingness to participate in my research. Don't worry about not remembering all details. You can probably see from my questions that I'm not that concerned with the content of the book.

As I am interested in the various ways in which the book has been read, while answering the questions, try not to think what kind of answers would be expected from you, but rather try to express your own feelings and opinions. Feel free to skip any of the questions, if you prefer not to answer.

Your reading experience:

1. What made you read *The Bookseller of Kabul*?
2. When and how did you get the book (bought yourself, received as a gift, borrowed it etc.)?
3. What did you think about the book? Your main impressions: did you like or dislike it? Did it evoke any special reactions in you?
4. Did the book change your impressions on Afghanistan? If yes, how?
5. Do you think the book represents Afghanistan well?
6. Did your reading experience have an impact on your future reading decisions? Did the book inspire you to read some other specific books? If yes, what were those books?
7. Did you recommend the book to someone?
8. Can you give some reasons why you decided to write a review on the book in Facebook? Is it your custom, or was this review an exception?
9. Did certain details or a certain story in the book make a particularly strong impression?
10. Did you read the book as fact or as fiction? Were you thinking about this while reading?

11. Have you heard about the public responses of Mr. Rais (the real person behind the bookseller of Kabul) to the book?
12. Have you heard that Mr. Rais has written a book himself? Have you read it? Would you have interest in reading it?
13. If there is something else about your reading experience you would like to share with me, please do.

And lastly, I would like to know something about your background. This information helps me to organise my research data, but if you prefer not to answer these questions, just skip them.

1. Your gender?
2. Your nationality?
3. Your age?
4. Your religion?

Thank you for your time. Your help is really valuable. If you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact me. I also might want to come back to you after these answers.

Best, Hanna Kuusela (hanna.r.kuusela@gmail.com)

Appendix 5

THE ORIGINAL LANGUAGE VERSIONS OF THE CITATIONS USED IN THIS THESIS

ⁱ Boken gjør utstrakt bruk av direkte tale. Dette er et grep som gjør skildringer intime og nære. Hva er grunnlaget for den meget omfattende sitatbruk? La meg begrunne punktene ovenfor nærmere og begynne med det siste. "Bokhandleren i Kabul" er en bredt anlagt menneskeskildring, der mange personer portretteres i rik detalj. Det gjelder ikke bare Bokhandleren og hans familie, men også personer utenfor. Vi får adgang til deres innerste tanker og følelser via forfatteren, som gjør utstrakt bruk av direkte tale. Ikke bare synes hun å ha hatt adgang til folks hjerter, men vi får det også - tilsynelatende. Bruken av direkte tale bidrar til å gjøre personer og hendelser troverdige: Folk snakker jo med egne ord! De taler til hverandre og til forfatteren! Og vi er med på lasset. Eller er vi det?

ⁱⁱ Fem måneder med burka.

ⁱⁱⁱ Forfatteren kan sin afghanske kulturhistorie og behandler emnet nyansert. [...] Boken er også en rykende fersk samtidshistorie der siste års hendelser, oppdatert frem til sommeren 2002, flettes inn og knyttes opp til livet i bokhandlerens mangfoldige familie.

^{iv} En lettvent tendens har vært å kaste all skyld på Taliban, men de nye makthaverne er fundamentalister, de også. Vesten betrakter burquadrakten, hel dekkende fra topp til tå, som symbolet på Taliban-tvangen. Men det var ikke Taliban som tegnet eller sydde opp burqaen. Den var der lenge før Taliban, og vil være der også lenge etter superfundamentalistenes sorti.

^v Mennoen kvinner våger da å henge den fraseg.

^{vi} Fortellingene fra bokhandelen i Kabul er mer enn et familiedrama, de gir oss et nydelig og lærerikt tidsbilde fra det landet som på tragisk og befriende vis ble oppdaget av vesten på nytt den ellefte september.

^{vii} "I den nye bok "Bokhandleren i Kabul" skriver Seierstad suverent samtidshistorie med litterære midler"

^{viii} "Sharifa, Sonya, Leila, Shakila, Bulbula og Bibi Gul. Modre, dotre og søstre av Kabul. Kvinner som fortsatt lever i en tradisjon av århundrers primitive undertrykkelse."

^{ix} "En moderne slave, i et ekstremt arkaisk samfunn".

^x "Kvinnens liv i Afghanistan er ekstremt. Hun får tildelt et liv som andre har bestemt hvordan hun skal leve."

^{xi} Hvis det er noe negativt i min familie, vil jeg ikke være bekymret om det kommer fram. Det vil fore meg på denne riktige veien. Hvis du holder ting hemmelig, går det bare galt.

^{xii} Jeg er sjefen for familien. --- Jeg kan fike til dem, både mennene og kvinnene. I går ga jeg kona mi en skikkelig orefik fordi hun snakket for hardt til vår atten måneder gamle datter.

^{xiii} den naturalistiske stilen truer med å gjøre dem bare til ofre for skjebnen. Det er merkelig at det har vært mulig å skrive ei bok om Afghanistan i 2002 som er så upolitisk.

^{xiv} Ho fortalde ikkje at det som var interessant for henne, var å avsløre privatlivet hans, veikskapane hans, den patriarkalske atferda hans, og at målet var å døma ein heil kultur og religion ved å skandalisera små detaljar i heimen hans.

^{xv} Da jeg leste boken, ble jeg virkelig sjokkert. Da jeg prøvde å ta opp de moralske skrupler som Åsne Seierstads bok reiser, ble jeg møtt med en vegg av motvilje mot å fremme et synspunkt som foregrep begivenhetenes gang. Jeg følte at Seierstad var beskyttet av mystisk immunitet som jeg ikke klarte å forstå. Og derfor lurte jeg på hvorfor offentlige medier ikke var villige til å reise noen spørsmål om hennes troverdighet, ikke bare når det gjelder boken hennes om bokhandleren, men også hennes motstridende reportasjer fra mitt hjemland Irak.

^{xvi} Vi er heldige i Norge. Vi lever i et av verdens mest likestilte land. Kvinner og menns absolutte likeverd, har vært avgjørende for den friheten og høye graden av velferd som vi i generasjoner har nytt godt av. Vår høye grad av likestilling har resultert i at kvinner og menn omgås vennskapelig på arbeidsplassen, i organisert fritidsliv, i det offentlige rommet generelt, og i sosiale sammenhenger. Denne friheten – for både menn og kvinner – er en umistelig frihet.

Det er derfor svært beklagelig og uforståelig at regjeringen underkjenner prinsippet om likestilling ved å tillate hijab som del av politiuniformen. La det være klart: Hijab er ikke et verdinøytralt plagg. Hijab markerer kvinnen i det offentlige rommet som underlegen mannen

^{xvii} I og med at jeg ikke fikk vært til stede da bokhandleren leste boken, opprettet vi kontakt per telefon og e-post. To dager etter at bokhandleren hadde fått boken, ringte jeg til Shah Mohammad Rais. Jeg ville vite hva han syntes om boken. "Jeg er sjokkert", sa han og utrykte stor skuffelse over det han hadde lest. I frykt for at det skulle oppstod misforståelser, dette var tross alt krasse uttalelser, avtalte vi å ta alt på e-post etter endt telefonsamtale. Og slik jobbet vi frem saken, som til slutt ble publisert i KK uke 39, 2003.

Jeg valgte å benytte samme metode når jeg innhentet kommentar fra Åsne Seierstad. Først telefonsamtale, så e-post.

Seierstad valgte å ikke svare på spørsmålene jeg stilte, men skrev en uttalelse som hun sendte på e-post flere dager etter at hun fikk spørsmålene.

Om det er en tilfeldighet at Seierstad tok kontakt med Shah Mohammad Rais i mellomtiden, og at han etter dette ønsket å trekke intervjuet, er usikkert. Men det skulle vise seg å være langt vanskeligere å få konkrete svar fra kilden som var i Norge, Seierstad, enn kilden som befant seg i Kabul, Shah Mohammad.

Da jeg fikk e-posten fra Seierstad og det ble klart at hun ikke ønsket å svare konkret på de spørsmålene jeg hadde sendt henne, gjentok jeg spørsmålene, men igjen uten å få konkrete svar.

^{xviii} c) Kilden fikk kalde føtter:

Under arbeidet med "bokhandler- saken" opprettet Shah Mohammad Rais og Åsne Seierstad kontakt. Jeg viderefremidlet blant annet telefonnummer til begge parter, da de begge ønsket å komme i kontakt med hverandre.

Dagen for saken opprinnelig skulle komme på trykk og alt tilsynelatende skulle være i orden, tikket det inn en ny beskjed fra Kabul. Shah Mohammad hadde snakket med forfatter Åsne Seierstad. I frykt for å såre forfatteren og skape problemer for henne, ønsket ikke bokhandleren lenger at vi skulle publisere artikkelen. Han trakk hele intervjuet.

Kilden, som dagen før hadde brukt svært sterke ord, ønsket ikke lenger å forsvare sin ære slik han hadde ytret ønske om tidligere. Han mente fremdeles at Seierstad hadde brutt etiske retningslinjer ved å utnytte gjestfriheten slik han opplevde at hun gjorde. Han utrykte også at han fryktet for hva denne boken ville bety for vestlige leseres oppfatning av Afghanistan og afghansk kultur, dessuten utrykte han uro for eventuelle konsekvenser denne boken ville få for de kvinnene som var omtalt. Etter å ha kommunisert med Shah Mohammad Rais, og oversendt hele saken på engelsk, godkjente likevel kilden innholdet og artikkelen gikk i trykken.

^{xix} Bokhandleren i Kabul foler seg sveket av Åsne Seierstad.

^{xx} Jeg ønsket henne velkommen i henhold til afghanske hofflighets- normer, uten å kreve noe av henne. Hun var en kvinne og en gjest! Alle familiemedlemmene ønsket henne velkommen og respekterte henne i fem måneder. --- Hun var VIP-gjest i alle familiesammen- henger i vårt hjem, og i våre slekt- ningers hjem. Vi slapp henne veldig dypt inn i våre familieaffærer. Jeg skjulte aldri noe for henne.

^{xxi} Jeg spurte om hun kunne over- sette boken for meg, men hun skjulte den alltid, og oversatte ikke engang et kapittel. Boken er basert på noen få hendelser, og en veldig dårlig og usann historie. Hun sier at hun har anonymisert meg, men alt er uendret; min jobb- adresse, mitt fødested, og mange andre ting.

^{xxii} Problemet var at jeg ikke fikk lov av det engelske for- laget mitt. Jeg ser at jeg burde sagt at det skulle jeg kreve. Det er jeg veldig lei meg for nå, at jeg ikke sto på mer. De sa at de ikke ville ha noen forandringer. Jeg er veldig sint på meg selv for at jeg ikke krevde det den gangen, sier hun.

^{xxiii} – Ja, men det er det jeg som foreslo at han skulle si: at han kan fortelle folk at det ikke handler om ham, at det er ting jeg har funnet på.

Åsne fremhever at dette er kvinnenens bok, at hun har fått mye ros fra afghanske kvinner, og sier om bok- handleren:

– Man kan spørre seg hvil- ken bok denne mannen ville vært fornøyd med? Det ville jo blitt et glansbilde. Han har nok mer drømt om at dette skulle bli en biografi om en helt.

^{xxiv} Jeg vil saksøke henne og alle forleggerene hennes for ærekrenkelse og ryktespredning. Jeg vil komme til Norge for å kjøre saken i retten her.

^{xxv} Han må gjerne skrive hva han vil i sitt eget navn, men han får ikke gjøre noe slikt med min bok, fastslår Åsne.

^{xxvi} Den ser ut som den lever sitt eget liv, sier hun.

^{xxvii} Etter det Ny Tid erfarer føler hun seg lurt, og mener Åsne Seierstad ikke er et bra menneske.

^{xxviii} Det er ikke noe galt i at Rais' kone støtter familien. Men hvis folk tror at hun snakker friere fordi hun bor i Canada, tar de feil. Siden bokhandleren har gitt tillatelse til konen og datteren til å gjøre intervjuet, er det klart at dette undergraver troverdigheten, sier Sonya Velez til Aftenposten.

^{xxix} At jeg valgte Damm, skyldes at de er godt organisert i Skandinavia, og de gir meg muligheten til å utgi begge mine to boker.

^{xxx} De har forpliktet seg til å gi ut boken samtidig i Norge, Sverige og Danmark.

^{xxxi} her er det stor inkonsekvens i hans egne uttalelser. Han tar ingen form for selvkritikk og fremstiller seg selv og sine familiemedlemmer som glansbilder. Bildet av en patriark som styrer familien med selvskreven rett blir bekreftet med denne teksten.

^{xxxii} Jeg antar det er flere enn meg som skulle ønske Shah Muhammad Rais, alias Bokhandleren i Kabul, hadde skrevet et sabla godt forsvar mot Seierstad. Det er vel ingen bombe at det ikke er tilfelle. For den lenge bebudede «motboka» er til dels helt umulig.

^{xxxiii} Han skriver ikke godt. Eventyret om trollene er en bisarr, men også banal historie.

^{xxxiv} Vår mann i Kabul.

^{xxxv} Både myndigheter og presse i Norge har behandlet bokhandleren stygt. Han er latterliggjort og mistenkeliggjort. Først tok vi heder og ære fra ham og så latterliggjorde vi ham. Jeg mener Norge har en moralsk forpliktelse til å behandle ham anstendig. At han er latterliggjort og så nektet visum, er opprørende.

^{xxxvi} Det er et angrep på retten til ytringsfrihet at en forfatter på denne måten nektes å være til stede ved lanseringen av sin egen bok. Vi ser det som urovekkende at norske myndigheter ikke overholder en grunnleggende menneskerettighet, en menneskerettighet som Norge har forpliktet seg til å forsvare.

^{xxxvii} Hun valgte å fortelle historien fremfor å beskytte kilden. Det har skjedd før, og det må skje igjen.

^{xxxviii} Åsne Seierstad har gitt afghanske kvinner et ansikt utad, og jeg opplever at fortellingen i stor grad er myntet på undertrykkningen av kvinnene og tildels barna. En hel verden har fått åpnet øynene for dette, og det vil påvirke verdensopinionen til øket handling mot kvinnediskrimineringen.

^{xxxix} En forfatters oppgave er å fremvise virkeligheten - avdekke løgner, tabuer og tilsløringer. Det blir ikke god litteratur ved å utvise høflighet. Ubehagelige sannheter skal og må trekkes frem i lyset, selv om de må trekkes etter halen.

^{xl} Ytringsfrihet er ingen frihet, den er en plikt. Ytringsfriheten er en av grunnpilarene, kanskje den aller viktigste, i demokratiet. Uten rett til sann ytring, ingen medbestemmelse: ingen mulighet til endring og påvirkning.

^{xli} Men denne boken handler ikke om afghansk privatliv. Når det private er et gjennomgående trekk i et samfunn, er det nemlig ikke privat lenger. Da er det private en sannhet som må frem. Og enhver som kjenner den sannheten har en plikt til å formidle den videre, slik Seierstad har gjort.

^{xlii} Å skrive og utgi boker koster. Å by på sin egen personlige tekst i det offentlige rom, kan være en påkjenning. En forfatter er et menneske som likevel våger og velger å gjøre nettopp dette. Prisen man betaler er å utsette seg selv for offentlig kritikk fra alle hold, fra stort og smått, fra klokt og dumt. Men man forventer at denne kritikken er saklig og åpen, selv om den er hard og nådeløs. Man forventer ikke personangrep.

^{xliii} Alle har rett til å kritisere Seierstad. Det er også ytringsfrihet. Men det lavmål av saklighet ovenfor en høyt respektert kollega vi her er vitne til, skremmer oss.

^{xliv} Leder ut i et etisk vanskelig område, et landskap der begreper som "personvern", "ære" og "tradisjon", må veies opp mot størrelser som "synliggjøring", "menneskeverd" og "sannhet".

^{xlv} Det er fordi de anerkjenner at den historien Åsne Seierstad forteller i boken er nødvendig, troverdig og verd å fortelle. Nøyaktig de grunner som lå bak forlagets antagelse, og som gjør at vi - uten å nøle - ville gjort det igjen.

^{xlvi} I USA henger ytringsfriheten veldig høyt. Det blir umulig å få stoppet boken der. Dette er allerede en internasjonal bestselger. Det viser anmeldelsen av den engelske utgaven i Newsweek siste uke. Det er ikke hvilken som helst bok som blir anmeldt der.

^{xlvii} Riktignok mener retten at utgivelsen av boken med utsagnene om og bildet av Rais gir et tilskudd til en offentlig debatt av stor allmenn interesse. Afghanistan har over lengre tid hatt en viktig plass i nyhetsbildet, både i Norge og utlandet. Særlig har ISAF / NATO sine militære operasjoner og det internasjonale samfunnet for øvrig sitt arbeid fra høsten 2001 med sikte på å skape sikkerhet, stabilitet og fred i landet, vært gjenstand for stadig debatt. Kvinnenes situasjon i landet, har vært en del av denne. Deres situasjon har av mange blitt trukket frem som en av flere grunner til at ISAF / NATO og det internasjonale samfunnet gikk inn i, og har blitt værende i landet.

^{xlviii} At bokhandleren ikke liker boka, er kanskje ikke overraskende. For dette ble kvinnenens bok, ikke hans. Jeg har fortalt kvinnenens historie.

^{xlix} Åsne Seierstad har gitt afghanske kvinner et ansikt utad, og jeg opplever at fortellingen i stor grad er myntet på undertrykkingen av kvinnene og tildels bama.

ⁱ "Englanninkielisestä käännöksestä on kuitenkin poistettu kolme kohtaa. Yksi, jossa hän kertoo miltä naiset näyttäivät kylvyssä, jolloin he eivät ole burkhan suojassa ja toinen, jossa kerrotaan miten yhtä sikäläisittäin erikoisessa asennossa toteutettavaa yhdyntää seurataan avaimenreijästä. Kolmannessa kuvataan "kunniamurha", jossa veljet surmaavat sisarensa."

ⁱⁱ Ha squarciato il velo ed è affiorata la verità

ⁱⁱⁱ Campeao nas listas de mais vendido a New York Times.

ⁱⁱⁱⁱ Autentisch und poetisch zugleich.

^{lv} Un grand livre et un document extraordinaire.

^{lv} Ficará como um dos melhores livros de reportagem sobre a vida afegã depois de queda de Talibã.

^{lvi} Hennes berättelse om nuets sargade posttalibanska Afghanistan är stark och gripande, fylld av konkreta iakttagelser, skriven på en rak, effektivt prosa."

^{lvii} Ik had als journaliste verslag gedaan van de oorlog in Afghanistan en dacht dat het boeiend zou zijn om over het leven van gewone mensen te schrijven. Ik wilde het verhaal achter de stereotypen vertellen.

^{lviii} Selv om dette ikke er det mest privatsensitive og krenkende utsagnet, underbygger det fremstillingen av Rais som en kvinne uten egne meninger, som er styrt av menn, og som andre syns er dum.

^{lix} Opplysningene om Rais sine tanker og følelser, er sensitive. De er tillagt henne som sanne, og publisert uten at Seierstad og Cappelen Damm kan anses for å ha handlet i god tro for å sikre at de er riktige og nøyaktige. Rais er ikke kilden til opplysningene, og kan ikke sies å ha medvirket til dem. Publisering av opplysninger som de aktuelle, er belastende i seg selv, og kunne lett påvirke hennes forhold til familien og omverdenen.

^{lx} For øvrig forholdt de seg til og stolte på Seierstads fremstilling om at boken helt og holdent bygde på familiens fortellinger etter at den var blitt gjort inneforstått med bokplanene slik det fremgår av forordet. De gjorde ingen egne undersøkelser av om det var dekning for fremstillingen. Berntsen har vist til at det er Seierstad som er forlagets kontraktspart, ikke familien Rais. Siden forlaget ved dets ansatte bare har valgt å stole på Seierstads vurderinger, mener retten at de må identifiseres med hennes uaktsomhet. Forlaget er da ansvarlig etter skadeerstatningsloven § 3-6 andre ledd.

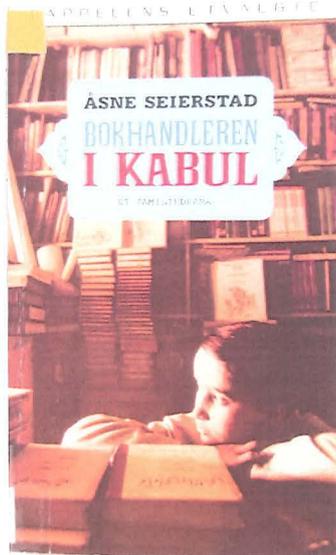
Appendix 6. THE COVERS OF THE BOOKSELLER OF KABUL



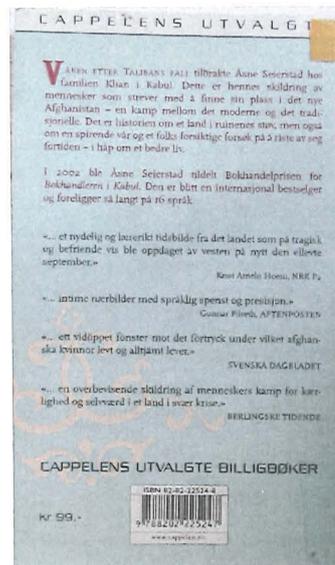
Cover_001. Norwegian cover. Year 2002. Designed by Stian Hole. Cover photograph by Kate Brooks. Published by Cappelen. Image received from the publisher.



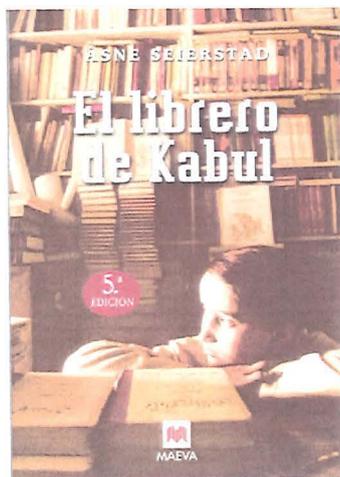
Cover_002. Swedish cover. Year 2002. Designed by Sara Acedo. Cover photograph by Kate Brooks. Published by Nordstedts. Photographed in the National Library of Norway by Hanna Kuusela.



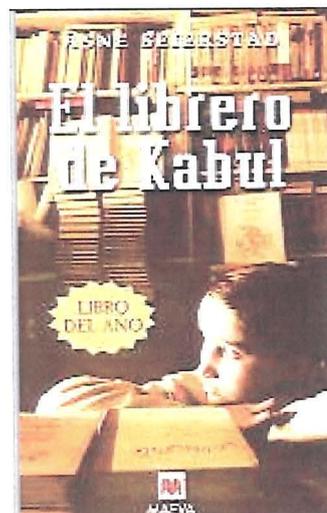
Cover_003. Norwegian cover. Year 2003. Paperback. Cover photograph by Kate Brooks. Published by Cappelen. Photographed in the National Library of Norway by Hanna Kuusela.



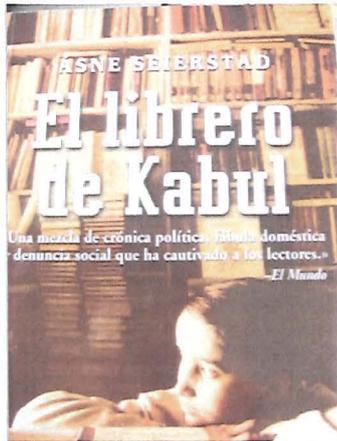
Cover_003b. Back cover of the Norwegian edition. Year 2003. Paperback. Published by Cappelen. Photographed in the National Library of Norway by Hanna Kuusela.



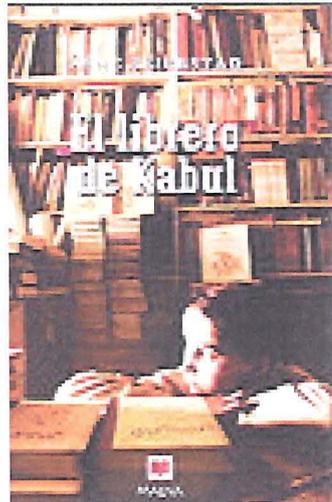
Cover_004. Spanish cover. Exact year unknown. Cover photograph by Kate Brooks. Published by Maeva. Downloaded in the internet.



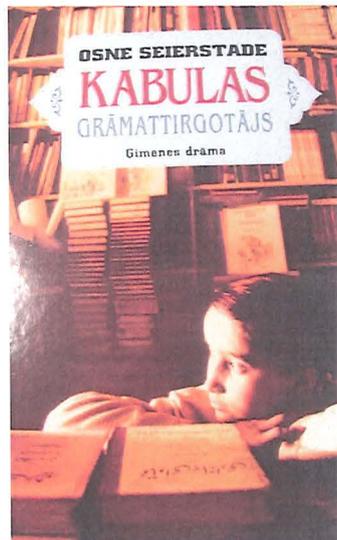
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Cover_006. Spanish cover. Exact year unknown. Cover photograph by Kate Brooks. Publisher unknown. Downloaded in the internet.



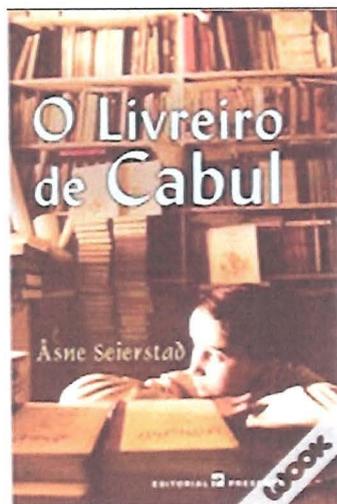
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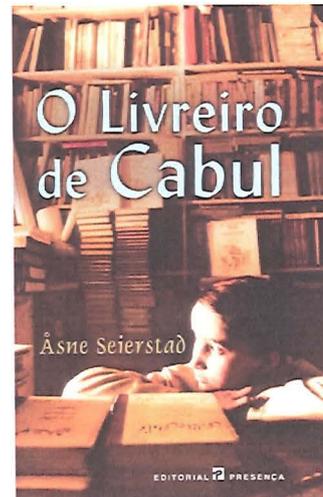
Cover_008. Latvian cover. Year 2003. Cover photograph by Kate Brooks. Published by Zvaigzne. Photographed in the National Library of Norway by Hanna Kuusela.



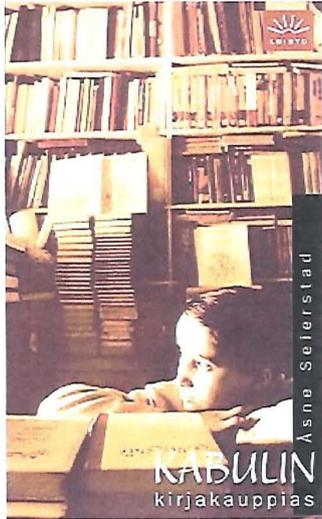
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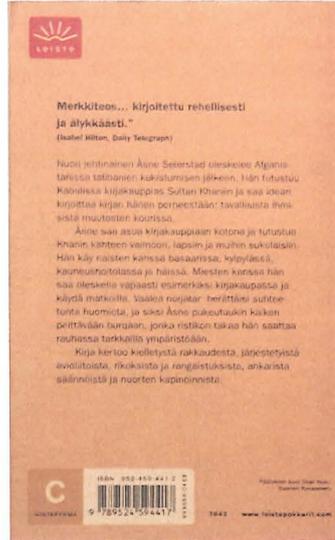
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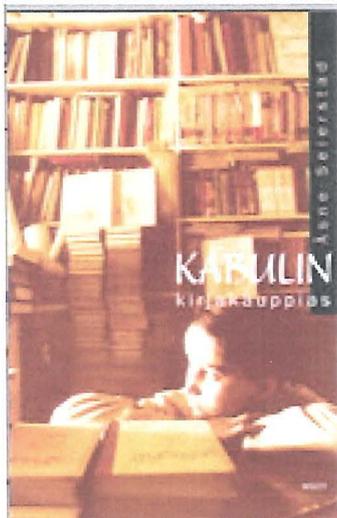
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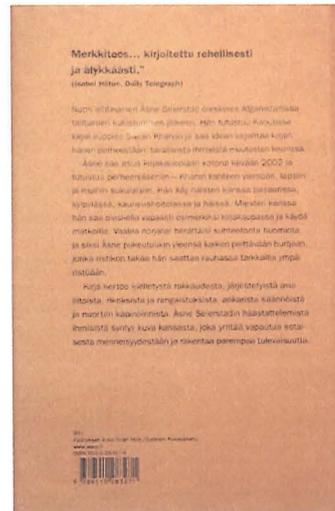
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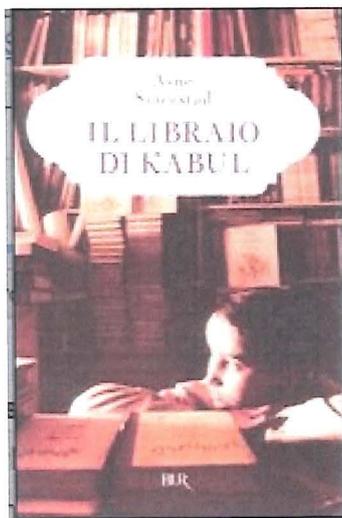
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The back cover
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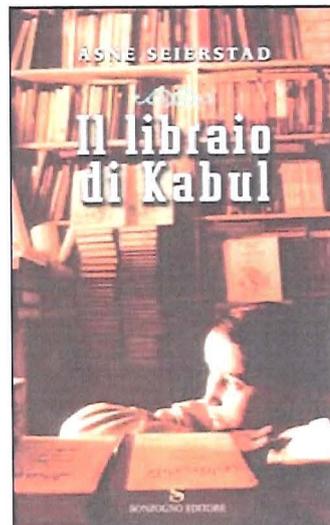
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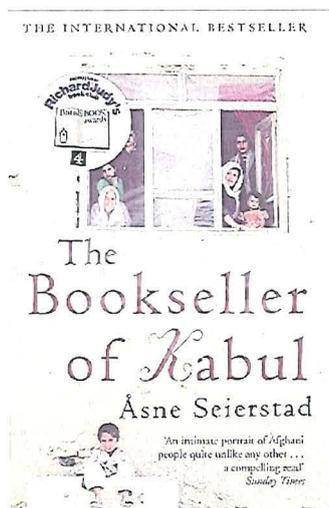
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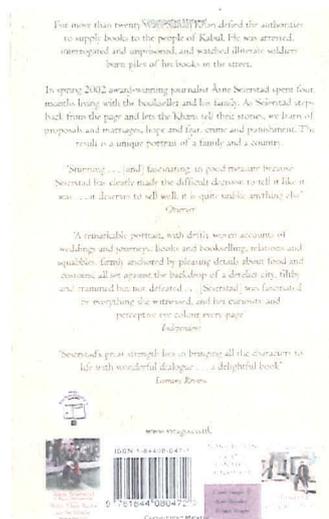
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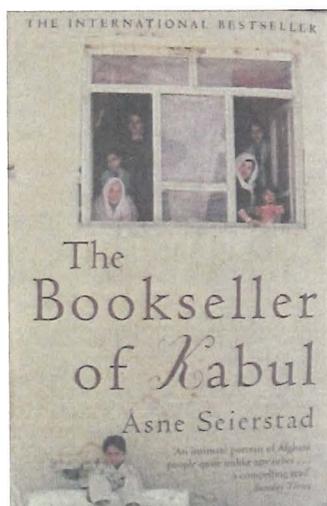
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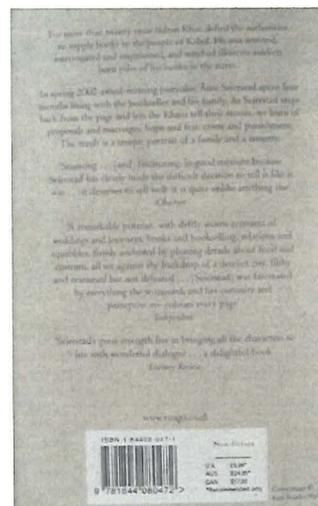
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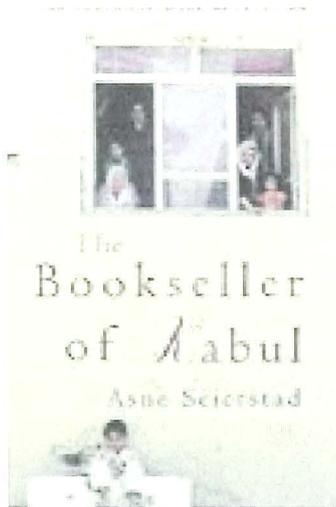
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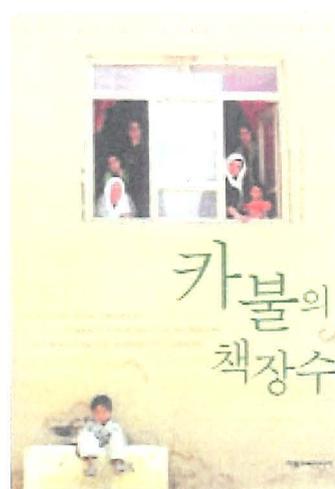
Cover_017. UK cover. Paperback. Year 2004. Cover photograph by Kate Brooks. Published by Virago. The copy owned and photographed by Hanna Kuusela.



Cover_017b. The back cover of the UK cover. Paperback. Year 2004. Cover photograph by Kate Brooks. Published by Virago. The copy owned and photographed by Hanna Kuusela.



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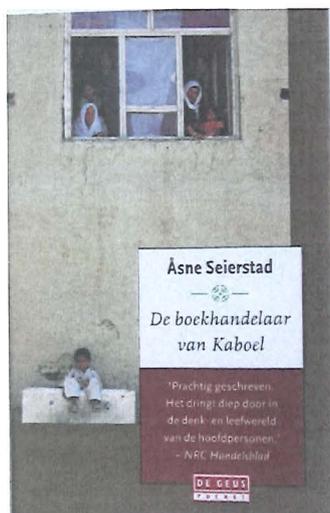
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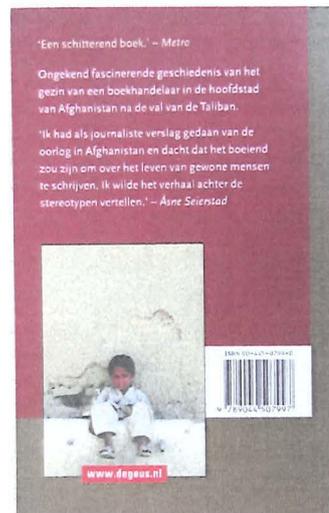
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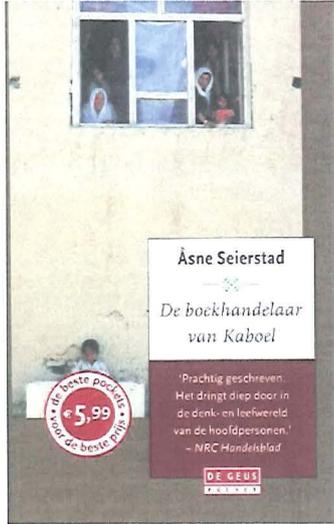
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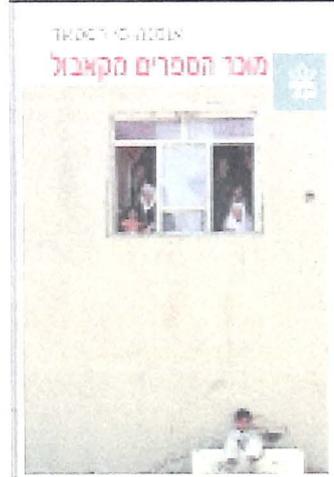
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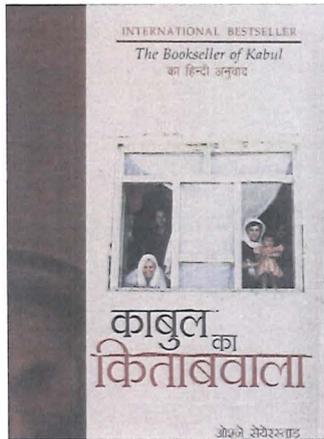
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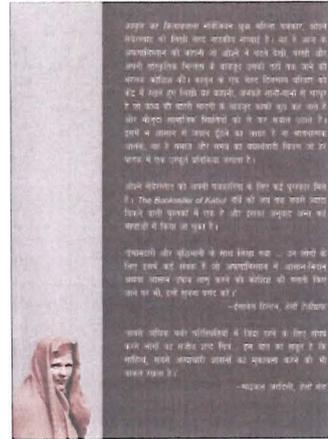
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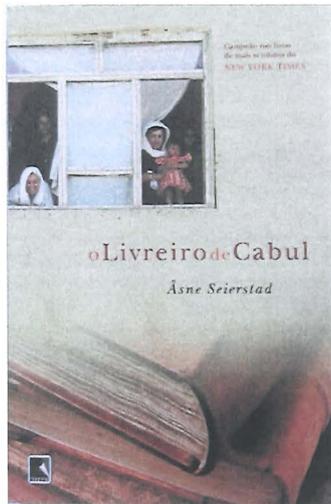


Cover_025b. The
back cover of
the Hindi edi-
tion. Exact year
unknown. De-
signer unknown.
Published by
Arvind Kumar.
Downloaded in
the internet.



Cover_026.
Turkish cover.
Exact year
unknown. Pub-
lished by Alkim.
Downloaded in
the internet.





Cover_027. Brazilian cover. Year 2006. Designed by Leonardo Iaccarino. Photographed in the National Library of Norway by Hanna Kuusela.



Cover_027b. Back cover of the Brazilian edition. Year 2006. Designed by Leonardo Iaccarino. Photographed in the National Library of Norway by Hanna Kuusela.



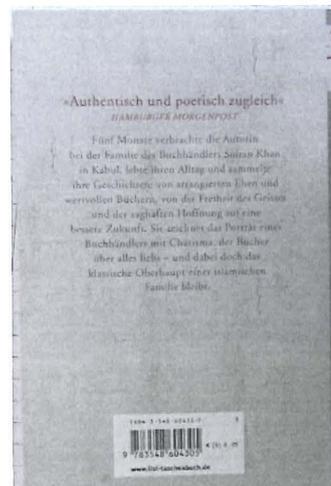
Cover_028. German cover. Exact year unknown. Published by Classen. Downloaded in the internet.



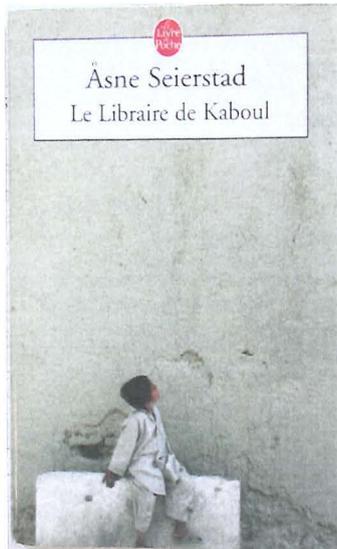
Cover_029. German cover. Exact year unknown. Published by List Tb. Downloaded in the internet.



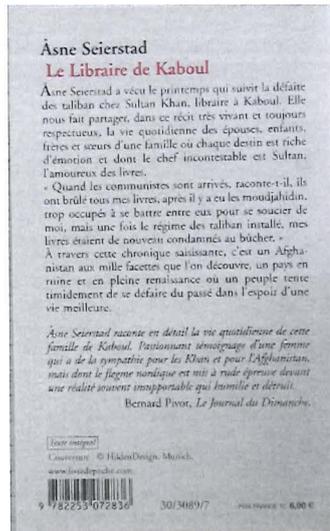
Cover_030. German cover. Paperback. Year 2004. Designed by Hilden Design. Published by List Tb. Photographed in the National Library of Norway by Hanna Kuusela.



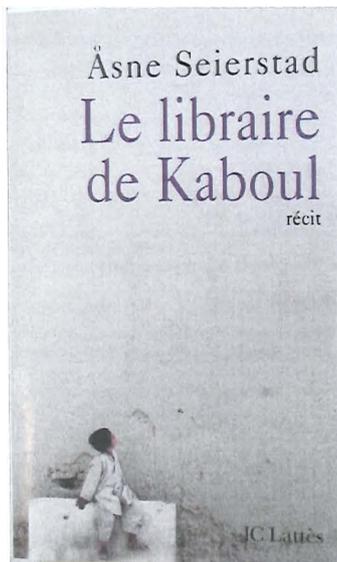
Cover_030b. The back cover of the German cover. Paperback. Year 2004. Designed by Hilden Design. Published by List Tb. Photographed in the National Library of Norway by Hanna Kuusela.



Cover_031.
French cover.
Paperback. Year
2003. Designed
by Hilden De-
sign. Published
by Le Livre de
Poche. Photo-
graphed in the
National Library
of Norway by
Hanna Kuusela.
Hole.



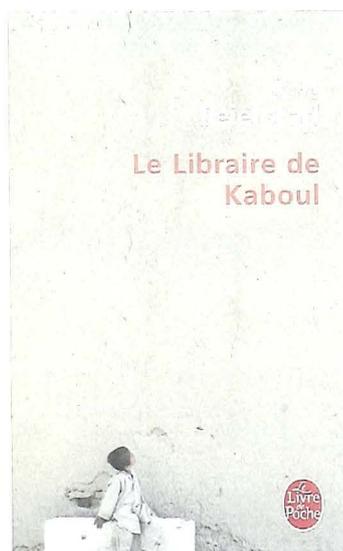
Cover_031b. The
back cover of the
French cover.
Paperback. Year
2003. Designed
by Hilden De-
sign. Published
by Le Livre de
Poche. Photo-
graphed in the
National Library
of Norway by
Hanna Kuusela.



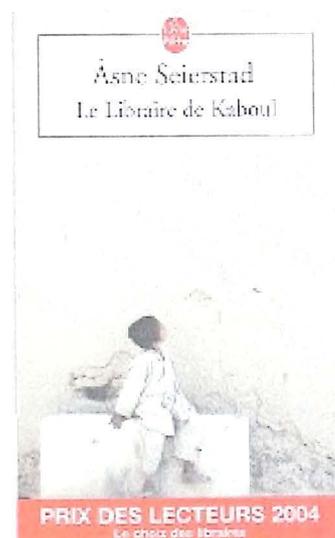
Cover_032.
French cover.
Paperback. Year
2003. Designed
by Hilden De-
sign. Published
by JC Lattes.
Photographed
in the National
Library of Nor-
way by Hanna
Kuusela.



Cover_032b.
French cover.
Paperback. Year
2003. Designed
by Hilden De-
sign. Published
by JC Lattes.
Photographed
in the National
Library of Nor-
way by Hanna
Kuusela.



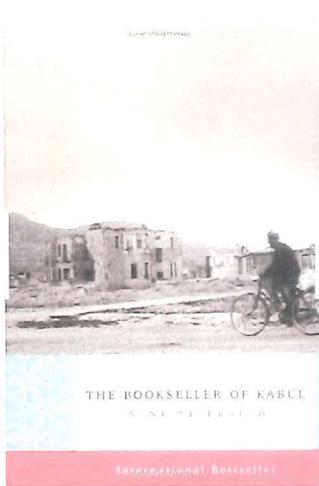
Cover_033.
French cover.
Exact year
unknown.
Published by Le
Livre de Poche.
Downloaded in
the internet.



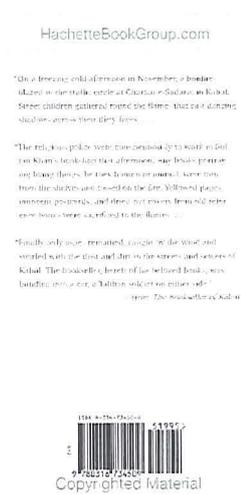
Cover_034.
French cover.
Exact year
unknown.
Published by Le
Livre de Poche.
Downloaded
in the internet.



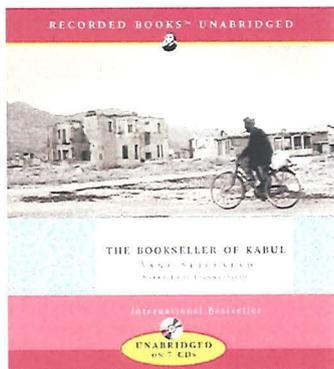
Cover_035. Israeli cover. Exact year unknown. Designer unknown. Published by Keter. Downloaded in the internet.



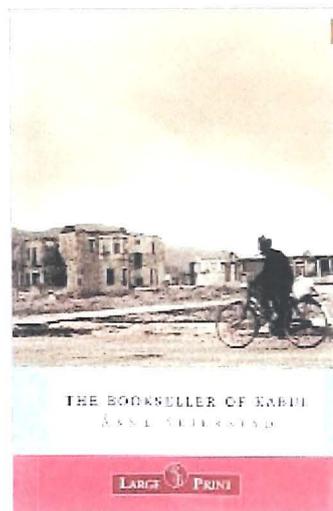
Cover_036. US cover. Exact year unknown. Designed by Yoori Kim. Cover photograph by Thomas Dworzak. Published by Hachette Book Group. Downloaded in the internet.



Cover_036b. The back cover of the US cover. Exact year unknown. Designed by Yoori Kim. Published by Hachette Book Group. Downloaded in the internet.



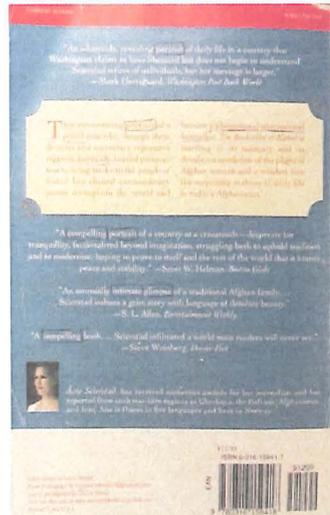
Cover_037. The cover of the US audiobook (CD). Year 2005. Designed by Yoori Kim. Cover photograph by Thomas Dworzak. Published by Recorded Books Unabridged. Downloaded in the internet.



Cover_038. US cover. Year 2004. Designed by Yoori Kim. Cover photograph by Thomas Dworzak. Published by LB Large Print. Downloaded in the internet.



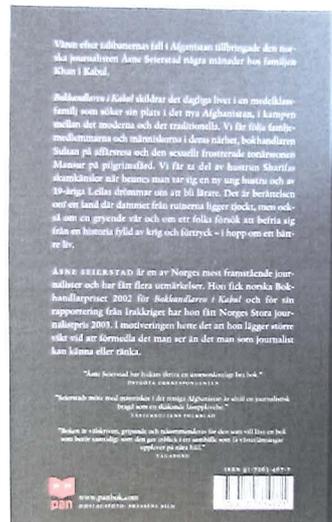
Cover_039. US cover. Paperback. Designed by Carin Berger. Cover photograph by Thomas Dworzak. Published by Back Bay. The copy owned and photographed by Hanna Kuusela.



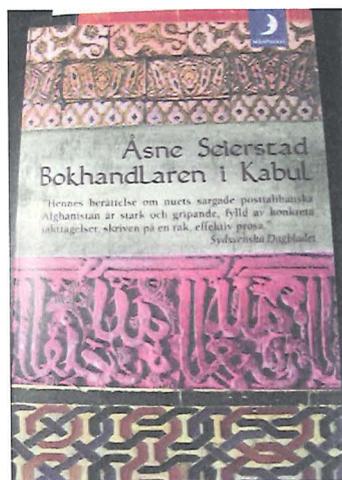
Cover_039b. The back cover of the US edition. Paperback. Designed by Carin Berger. Published by Back Bay. The copy owned and photographed by Hanna Kuusela.



Cover_040. Swedish cover. Hardcover. Year 2003. Designed by Johannes Molin. Published by Pan Bok. Photographed in the National Library of Norway by Hanna Kuusela.



Cover_040b. The back cover of the Swedish cover. Hardcover. Year 2003. Designed by Johannes Molin. Published by Pan Bok. Photographed in the National Library of Norway by Hanna Kuusela.



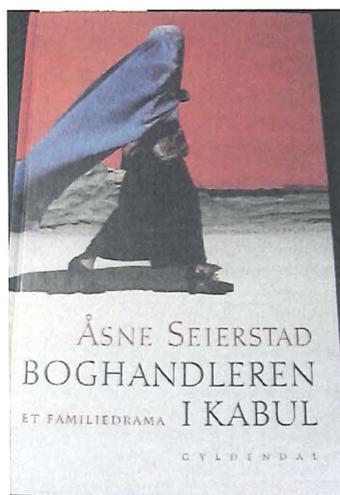
Cover_041. Swedish cover. Paperback. Year 2003. Designed by Johan Pettersson. Published by MånPocket. Photographed in the National Library of Norway by Hanna Kuusela.



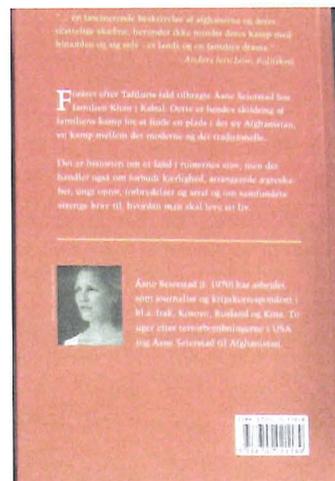
Cover_042.
Danish cover.
Hardcover.
Year 2003. This edition first published in 2002.
Designed by Ida Balslev-Olesen.
Published by Gyldendal. Photographed in the National Library of Norway by Hanna Kuusela.



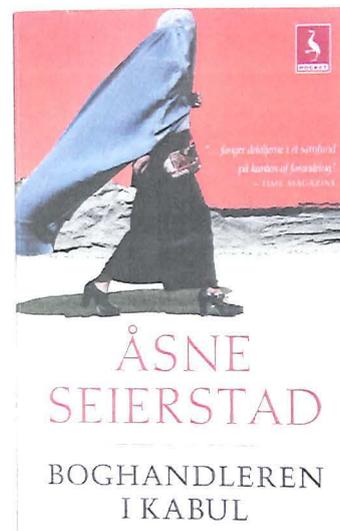
Cover_042b.
The back cover of the Danish cover. Hardcover.
Year 2003. This edition first published in 2002.
Designed by Ida Balslev-Olesen.
Published by Gyldendal. Photographed in the National Library of Norway by Hanna Kuusela.



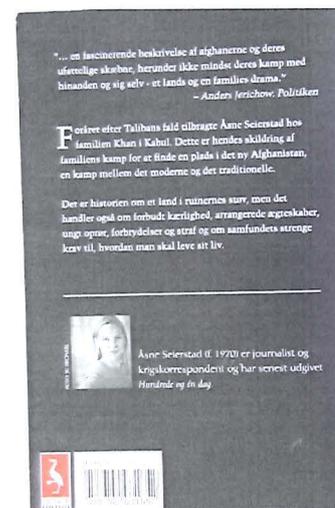
Cover_043.
Danish cover.
Hardcover.
Year 2004. This edition first published in 2003. Designed by Peter Stoltze.
Published by Gyldendal. Photographed in the National Library of Norway by Hanna Kuusela.



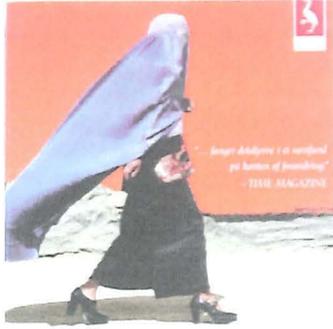
Cover_043b.
The back cover of the Danish cover. Hardcover.
Year 2004. This edition first published in 2003. Designed by Peter Stoltze.
Published by Gyldendal. Photographed in the National Library of Norway by Hanna Kuusela.



Cover_044.
Danish cover.
Paperback. Year 2004. Designed by Peter Stoltze.
Published by Gyldendal. Photographed in the National Library of Norway by Hanna Kuusela.



Cover_044b.
The back cover of the Danish cover. Paperback. Year 2004. Designed by Peter Stoltze.
Published by Gyldendal. Photographed in the National Library of Norway by Hanna Kuusela.

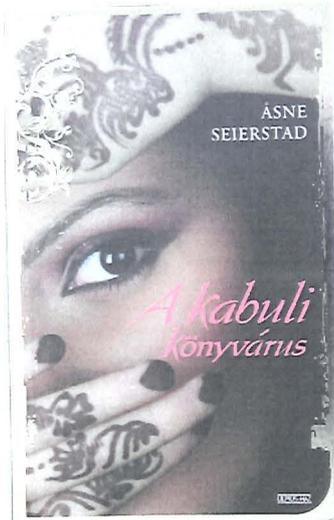


ASNE SEIERSTAD
BOGHANDLEREN
I KABUL

Cover_045.
Danish cover.
Paperback. Year
2008. Designed
by Peter Stoltze.
Published by
Gyldendal. Photo-
graphed in the
National Library of
Norway by
Hanna Kuusela.



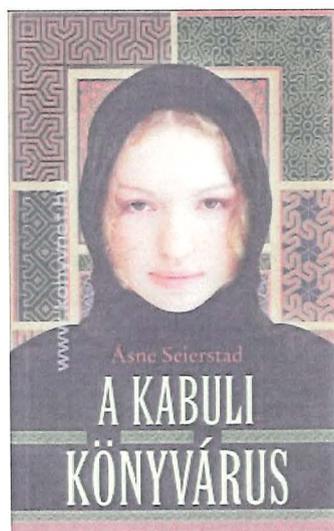
Cover_045b. The
backcover of the
Danish cover.
Paperback. Year
2008. Designed
by Peter Stoltze.
Published by
Gyldendal. Photo-
graphed in the
National Library of
Norway by
Hanna Kuusela.



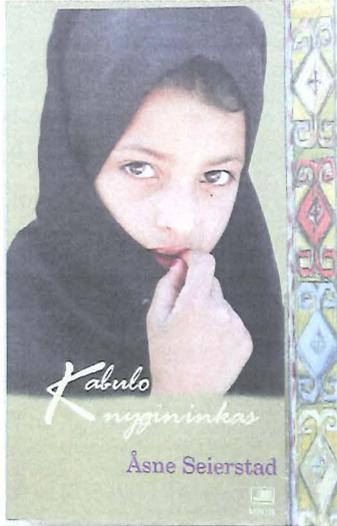
Cover_046.
Hungarian cover.
Paperback. Year
2007. Designer
unknown.
Published by
Ulpus Haz.
Photographed in
the National
Library of Nor-
way by Hanna
Kuusela.



Cover_046b. The
back cover of the
Hungarian cover.
Paperback. Year
2007. Designer
unknown. Pub-
lished by Ulpus
Haz. Photo-
graphed in the
National Library of
Norway by
Hanna Kuusela.



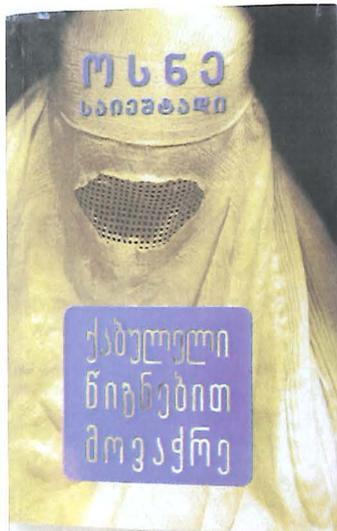
Cover_047.
Hungarian cover.
Year 2005. De-
signer unknown.
Published by
Ulpus Haz.
Downloaded in
the internet.



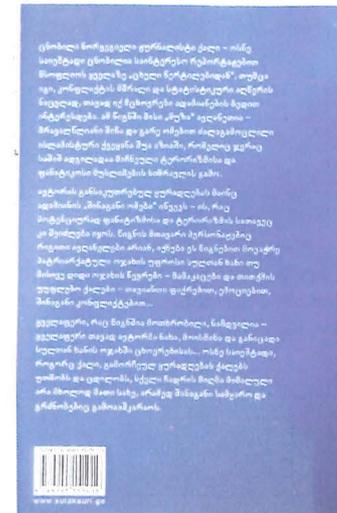
Cover_048.
Lithuanian cover. Year 2006. Designer unknown. Published by Mintis. Photographed in the National Library of Norway by Hanna Kuusela.



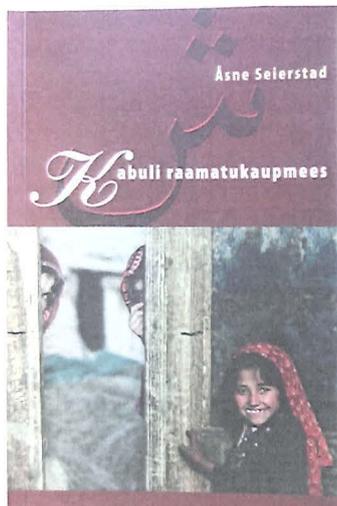
Cover_048b.
The back cover of the Lithuanian cover. Year 2006. Designer unknown. Published by Mintis. Photographed in the National Library of Norway by Hanna Kuusela.



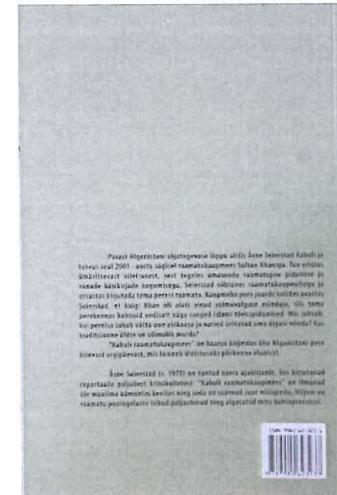
Cover_049.
Georgian cover. Paperback. Year 2009. Designed by Marta Tabukashvili. Published by Bakur Sulakauri Publishing. Photographed in the National Library of Norway by Hanna Kuusela.



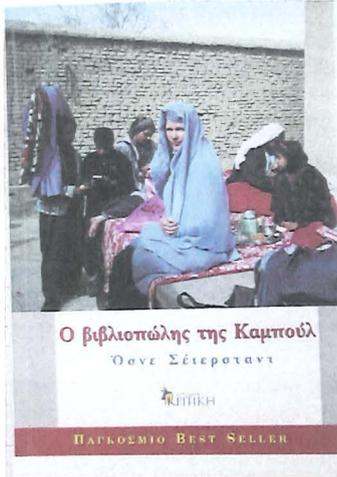
Cover_049b.
Georgian cover. Paperback. Year 2009. Designed by Marta Tabukashvili. Published by Bakur Sulakauri Publishing. Photographed in the National Library of Norway by Hanna Kuusela.



Cover_050.
Estonian cover. Paperback. Year 2005. Designer unknown. Published by Tänäpäev. Photographed in the National Library of Norway by Hanna Kuusela.



Cover_050b.
The backcover of the Estonian cover. Paperback. Year 2005. Designer unknown. Published by Tänäpäev. Photographed in the National Library of Norway by Hanna Kuusela.



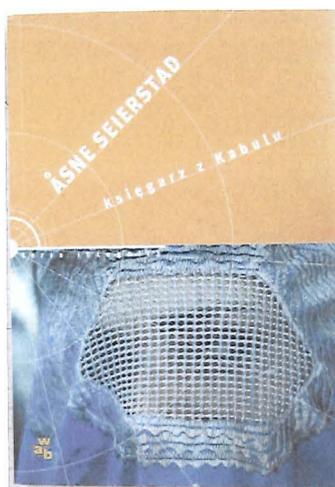
Cover_051. Greek cover. Paperback. Year 2003. Designer unknown. Published by Kritiki. Photographed in the National Library of Norway by Hanna Kuusela.



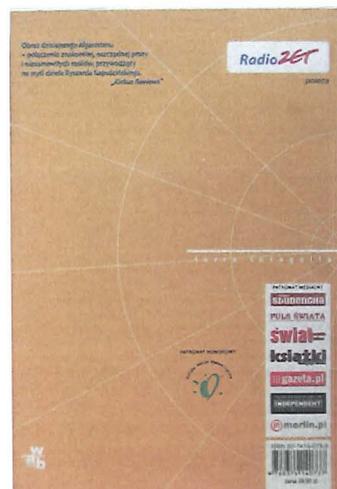
Cover_051b. The back cover of the Greek cover. Paperback. Year 2003. Designer unknown. Published by Kritiki. Photographed in the National Library of Norway by Hanna Kuusela.



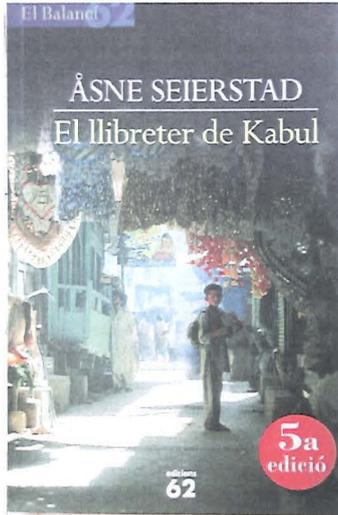
Cover_052. Polish cover. Exact year unknown. Designed by Magdalena Ponagajbo. Published by W.B.A. Downloaded in the internet.



Cover_053. Polish cover. Paperback. Year 2005. Designed by Magdalena Ponagajbo. Published by W.B.A. Photographed in the National Library of Norway by Hanna Kuusela.



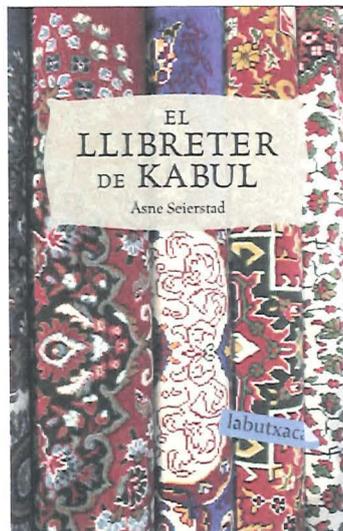
Cover_053b. The back cover of the Polish cover. Paperback. Year 2005. Designed by Magdalena Ponagajbo. Published by W.B.A. Photographed in the National Library of Norway by Hanna Kuusela.



Cover_054.
Catalan cover.
Paperback. Year
2004. Designed
by Francesc Sala.
Photograph by
Jaume Bartroli.
Published by El
Balanci. Photo-
graphed in the
National Library
of Norway by
Hanna Kuusela.



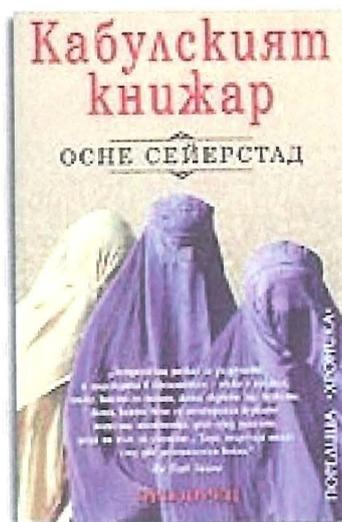
Cover_054b. The
back cover of the
Catalan cover.
Paperback. Year
2004. Designed
by Francesc Sala.
Photograph by
Jaume Bartroli.
Published by El
Balanci. Photo-
graphed in the
National Library
of Norway by
Hanna Kuusela.



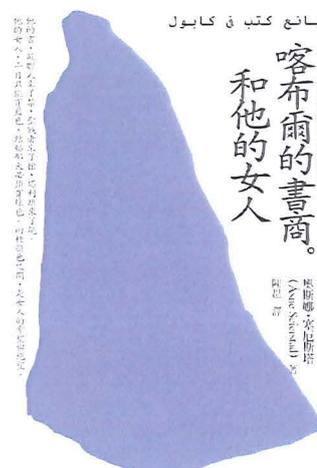
Cover_055. Catal-
an cover. Exact
year unknown.
Published by
Labutxaca.
Downloaded in
the internet.



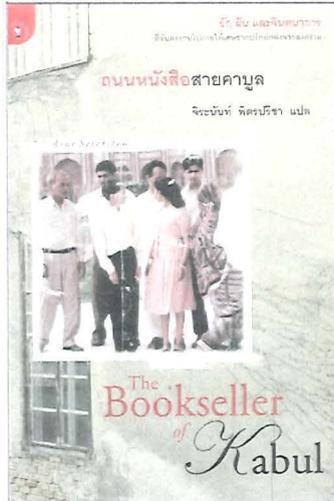
Cover_056.
Lebanese cover.
Exact year un-
known. Designer
unknown. Pub-
lished by Arab
Scientific Pub-
lishers, Lebanon.
Downloaded in
the internet.



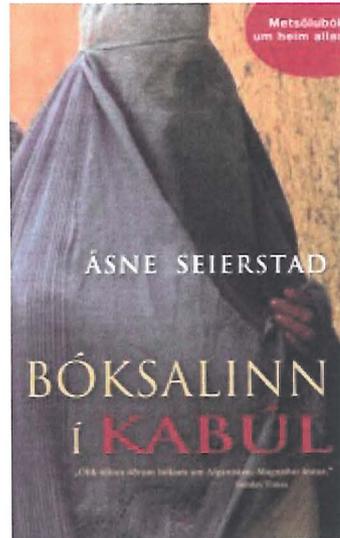
Cover_057.
Bulgarian
cover. Exact year
unknown.
Published by
Prozoretz.
Downloaded in
the internet.



Cover_058.
Chinese cover.
Exact year un-
known. De-
signer unknown.
Published by
Jieli Publishing.
Downloaded in
the internet.



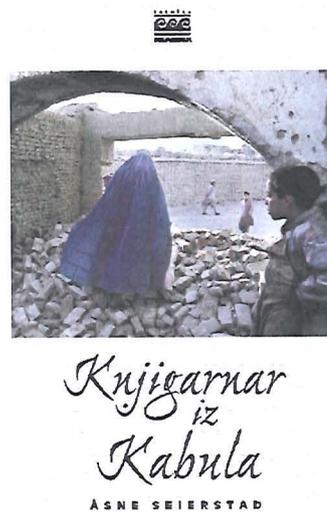
Cover_059. Thai cover. Exact year unknown. Designer unknown. Published by Matchon. Downloaded in the internet.



Cover_060. Icelandic cover. Year 2004. Designer unknown. Published by Mal og Menning. Downloaded in the internet.



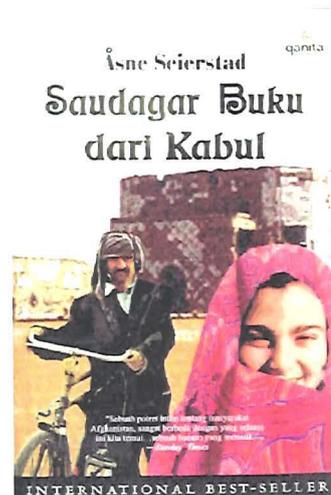
Cover_061. Icelandic cover. Year 2003. Designer unknown. Mal og Menning. Downloaded in the internet.



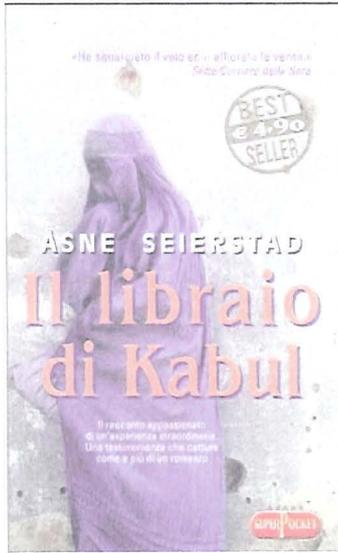
Cover_062. Slovenian cover. Exact year unknown. Designer unknown. Published by Založba Meander. Downloaded in the internet. First published in Slovenia in 2006.



Cover_063. Chinese cover. Exact year unknown. Designer unknown. Jieli Publishing. Downloaded in the internet. First published in Chinese in 2007.



Cover_064. Indonesian cover. Exact year unknown. Designer unknown. Published by Qanita. Downloaded in the internet. First Indonesian edition in 2005.



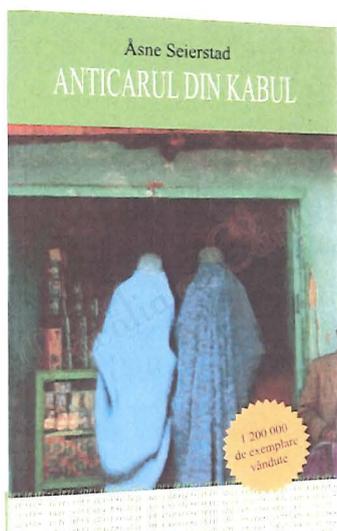
Cover_065.
Italian cover.
Paperback. Year
2005. Published
by RL Libri,
Superpocket.
Downloaded in
the internet.



Cover_065b.
Back cover of
the Italian cover.
Paperback. Year
2005. Published
by RL Libri,
Superpocket.
Downloaded in
the internet.



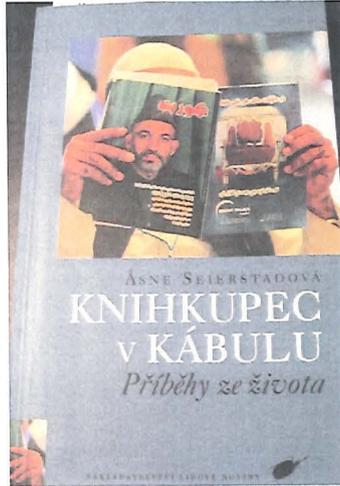
Cover_066.
Japanese cover.
Exact year un-
known. De-
signer unknown.
Published by
East Press.
Downloaded in
the internet.
First published
in Japanese in
2005.



Cover_067.
Romanian
cover. Year 2006.
Published by
Editura Allfa.
Downloaded in
the internet.



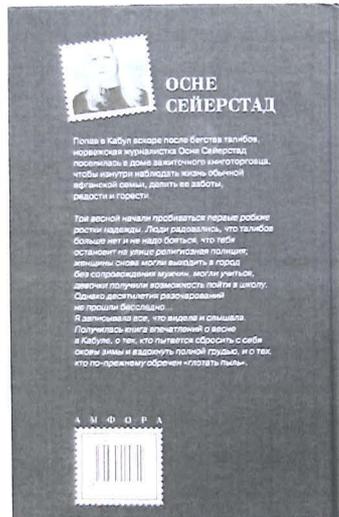
Cover_067b. The
back cover of
the Romanian
cover. Year 2006.
Published by
Editura Allfa.
Downloaded in
the internet.



Cover_068.
Czech cover.
Year 2005.
Designed by
Tomas Didunyk.
Published by
Nakladatelství
Lidové noviny.
Photographed
in the National
Library of Nor-
way by Hanna
Kuusela.



Cover_069. Rus-
sian cover. Year
2007. Designer
unknownn.
Published by
Amfora. Photo-
graphed in the
National Library
of Norway by
Hanna Kuusela.



Cover_069b.
The backcover
of the Rus-
sian cover. Year
2007. Designer
unknownn.
Published by
Amfora. Photo-
graphed in the
National Library
of Norway by
Hanna Kuusela.