



Crossing the Wire: One Woman's Journey into the Hidden Dangers of the Afghan War

AnnaMaria Cardinali

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When an explosive U.S. military report on the topic of sexuality in southern Afghanistan was leaked into mainstream American media, it generated a firestorm of attention and reaction. While some of the findings regarding Afghan sexual practices were simply of cultural interest, other findings were of grave humanitarian concern, such as the cyclical abuse of young boys, perpetuated over countless generations.

Because the topic became sensationalized, the author of the report, Dr. AnnaMaria Cardinalli, was discouraged to see her findings somewhat distorted in a public light. In this book, she takes the opportunity to provide the context of her research, which is as unique and revealing as the report itself.

Instead of a further academic account, this book is the author's journal—in fact “journey”—a personal invitation into the life and rare experience of a woman working on the farthest front of the War on Terror. As a member of one of the Pentagon's “Human Terrain Teams,” in the Pashtun south of Afghanistan, this read is not only interesting for its findings on Afghan sexuality but for its intimate window into the fascinating and almost surreal difficulty of our military's job in that country and beyond, and the surprisingly indispensable place of a woman's hand in the world of war.

Through the author's eyes, we ultimately experience the ways in which the issue of Afghan sexuality has profound impact on concerns from women's rights to Afghanistan's economic development and security to the recruitment and development of the terrorist threat to the Western world—a threat, she argues, we will not be free of without attention to this cycle of violence.

It is also fascinating in these pages to see how cultural sexism is not simply the province of semi-medieval Central Asians, but is also present in our own politico-military culture, as the author describes firsthand. This book goes far beneath the headlines of our seemingly endless war in Afghanistan to inform us of the exact situation among the opposition we've faced, in more important ways than one. It is must-reading for every citizen concerned with ours—or the Afghans'—progress henceforth in that region.

AnnaMaria Cardinalli has had an unusually varied career in both the performing arts and service to her country. A classical/flamenco guitarist and operatic singer, she became an international recording artist while still a teenager. A car accident having set back her musical career, she was accepted into the doctoral program in Theology at Notre Dame, and at age 24 became the youngest person awarded a Ph.D. from the university. After September 11, 2001, she responded to a call from the FBI for individuals with advanced degrees and cultural/religious expertise, which led to service in Iraq under the auspices of Joint Special Forces Command. In 2009 she became a member of the U.S. Army's first Human Terrain Team in Afghanistan, a unit designed to seek cultural understanding and civilian cooperation with U.S. forces. Today AnnaMaria Cardinalli, Ph.D., runs a private security firm in Santa Fe, NM, while continuing to enjoy opportunities to pursue her first love, of music.

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REVIEWS

“...In places it is raw, and this rawness can be uncomfortable. It also creates a strange sort of war memoir. There are the usual: tension and heroism, boredom and bureaucracy, bullets and bombs. But there are also the unusual: love and heartbreak, self-doubt and jealousy, fear and pride. Cardinalli falls in and out of love with a Marine, is captured and escapes from a local mullah, sits for days staring at blowing sand, marvels at the confidence of youth and its death and rebirth in the face of war, and strives to make her work matter. It's a vital mix that keeps you turning pages...The larger and better story?of a woman in many ways unprepared for the job she found herself doing, yet able to turn her native intellect, passion, and doggedness to the task-is well worth telling

New Mexico Magazine

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