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Speaking of 'Respect for Women': Gender and Politics in U.S. Foreign Policy Discourse, 2001-2004

By Alletta Brenner¹

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to examine how a language of 'women's rights' entered into foreign policy discourses of the Bush Administration in the period of 2001-2004. Through a discursive analysis of speeches, press releases, interviews and written documents, I find that feminist-inspired language and concepts entered into the mainstream discourse on numerous occasions throughout this period, though usually in the service of other foreign policy objectives. In this analysis, I identify three primary 'dialogical frames' in which such references appear, labelling these: 'Us vs. Them', 'The Active Leader', and 'The Moral Community'. Many feminists have argued that these kinds of references are disingenuous 'gender decoys'. While politically motivated calculation clearly played a role in this discourse, I argue that ideology and identity must also be taken into account as influencing factors. In conclusion, while problematic, the use of such language by the Bush Administration (or any government for that matter) also presents a discursive opening through which more substantive change may be achieved.

Keywords: Bush, Afghanistan, constructivism

Introduction

Since his earliest days in office, feminists have criticised George W. Bush for being what they perceive as hostile to 'women's rights'. In fact, many have argued that Bush's real war is not against terror, but rather against women, at home and around the world (Flanders et al 2004; Eisenstein 2006). Such criticism is not entirely unfair. Indeed throughout Bush's time in office, a wide range of domestic and foreign policies have had real detrimental impacts on women. Nonetheless, the claim that President Bush is simply 'anti-woman' is a vast oversimplification that fails to capture the true complexity of how ideas and language actually work to shape policy. In this paper I examine how and in what ways a rhetoric of 'women's rights' entered into the official foreign policy discourse of the Bush Administration from the period of 2001-2004. Through a close reading of speeches, press releases, interviews and foreign policy statements, I identify three 'dialogical frames', which, I argue, shed insight into the political and rhetorical manoeuvrings of the Bush Administration. By examining the ways that gender, identity and belief came to intersect with political realities during this period, I attempt to offer a partial explanation of how, why and to what effect such claims were made.

Before I begin, it is necessary to first lay down a methodological groundwork. In this work, I draw together two different methodological foundations from two disciplines—feminist studies and the school of constructivism in international relations (IR). Traditionally, there has been a disciplinary gap between international relations and

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feminist studies. For, while IR has in the past tended to ignore the ways in which international politics are influenced by cultural codes of masculinity, feminist scholars have likewise failed to theorise about international politics. Since the 1980s, however, critical feminist political theorists have begun attempting to fill this gap by examining the ways that politics is constructed and reproduced by material and ideational structures shaped by 'gender'—that is, how 'socially constructed, fluid, politically relevant identities, values, conventions and practices conceived as masculine and/or feminine' are mapped in multidimensional ways onto political structures, rules and norms' (Beckwith 131). 'Gender' is relevant to the study of IR because 'international processes have gender-differentiated consequences, and gender filters thought and practice' (Hooper 24). Historically, feminists argue, IR has been shaped according to the demands of hegemonic masculinity, resulting in a kind of international politics where certain kinds of values and norms are assumed to be natural and appropriate and others are either left out entirely or demonised. Likewise, traditional IR theory has tended to perpetuate a distorted, masculinist worldview, the validity of which relies on an understanding of politics and the state that ignores women, while at the same time obscuring the workings of patriarchal power (Tickner 1988). In response, feminist scholars of IR attempt to incorporate a worldview that takes account of women's experiences into empirical and theoretical explanations for the workings of international politics, aiming to create a more holistic understanding of politics by incorporating perspectives left out by the enormous body of male-oriented theory which is foundational to social science today (Ackerly et al; Steans 2006). The development of critical theories of IR—particularly those from the standpoint of constructivism—have contributed greatly to this project. For, emphasizing an 'ontology of becoming', constructivists draw attention to the ways politics is shaped by a variety of influences, including the norms, values and identities that are so important to feminist political theory (Burchill et al 2005).

My methodology in this paper is thus framed according to several basic ontological assumptions: that social and political action is shaped by ideas, norms and identities as well as by material structures; that such 'shared knowledge' is an essential process by which meaning is generated, and that this takes place in part through discourse; that agents and structures in international politics are thus mutually constituted; that while such normative and ideational forces are not the only factors in IR, it is possible to study their effects in a systemic manner (albeit in a limited, tentative fashion); and that feminism, as a movement that engages both politically and ideologically with discourse production, is an excellent example of a potentially normative force whose influence can and should be examined.

In this paper I utilise a method of scrutiny common to both constructivism and critical feminism—'discourse analysis'. 'Discourse' refers to both the process and the product of meaning-formation, generally as articulated through language. According to Michel Foucault, discourse constructs, defines and produces the objects of our knowledge by governing the way these objects can be talked about. However, this process is far more complex than the simple utterance of words. Rather, discourse is about the formation of ideas, each of which has its own depths of meaning and genealogical past. All speech acts only gain their meaning through the network of other signifiers to which they belong. In any speech act, in-between explicit and instrumental linguistic references to issues and ideas, countless other strata of meaning can be found, subsumed in shared

contextualising assumptions, metaphors and symbolisms. These ‘dialogical frames’ are reflections not only of the beliefs and identities of an individual speaker, but also those of the community in which he or she acts.

Attempting to capture and analyse every single speech act containing references to ‘women’s rights’ and relevant to U.S. foreign policy over the course of four years would be an extremely difficult if not impossible. As a result, I draw my evidence for this project from a single pre-selected source—a database of speeches, statements and press conferences accumulated and made publicly available by the U.S. State Department. While no doubt limited, this database (which includes the voice of the President as well as a range of other official and unofficial spokespersons who speak on the behalf of his administration) provides an excellent cross-section of those ‘speech acts’ that the Administration both believed to be significant to U.S. foreign policy and that it wished to transmit to a wider audience over time. Presidential administrations tend to carefully orchestrate particular ‘messages’ even down to precise wordings, which all representatives are charged with duly repeating. As a result, I treat the totality of these many different ‘speech acts’ as though they represent a single voice. Since my primary concern is the Administration’s discursive references to themes and language of feminist-origin, I read all speech acts that through their titles and/or subjects reflected this content. However, in order to capture those references that were not so immediately identifiable, I also conducted a randomised survey of the whole database ranging from the beginning of 2001 to the end of 2004, through which additional qualifying speech acts were also identified.²

Ultimately, almost all of the speech acts identified in my analysis as containing ‘women’s rights’ rhetoric utilised one of three dialogical frames. I call these: ‘Us vs. Them’, ‘The Active Leader’ and ‘The Moral Community’. In each of these, metaphors of gender played a crucial role. Moreover, these dialogical frames often tied the Administration’s specific claims about women’s rights into larger narratives about the United States, its friends and its enemies that functioned to explain and justify broader U.S. foreign policy objectives.

‘Us vs. Them’

The dichotomous cliché of ‘Us vs. Them’ is a staple of political rhetoric. However, during the period from 2001-2004 it was used with a particular vehemence in specific ways in reference to women’s rights. In this particular incarnation, the dialogical frame of Us vs. Them is characterised by descriptions of how women’s human rights are violated in certain states around the world, which are then contrasted with a particular vision of the United States wherein it is presumed such things never happen. In doing so, it tends to focus on a relatively small handful of states that have been internationally labelled as human rights violators-- such countries as Sudan, Afghanistan, Burma, North Korea, China and Iraq – accusing them of a laundry list of anti-woman offences, describing both how bad things are in these ‘bad’ states, and what the United States is

² To identify such ‘acts’ I often looked for specific linguistic signifiers such as ‘women’s rights’ or ‘female empowerment’. However, I also included texts that made reference to issues, policies or ideas originally developed and promoted by feminist activists, and that were, I would argue, part of the same rhetorical framework.

trying to do to improve the situation in those countries, be this by economic sanctions or targeted aid programmes. In this way, the United States is framed not only as innocent, but as fundamentally different from those 'evil doers' elsewhere who have no respect for human life. The attention paid to these states' 'lack of respect' for women only emphasises this point further, by drawing attention to the notion that they would harm those who are presumed to be incapable of defending themselves.

The presumption of American innocence and righteousness that the Us vs. Them frame depends upon is rooted in a sense of American moral authority drawn from a particular national mythology that posits that the United States is not only the oldest and original modern democracy but that it was the first to respect 'fundamental freedoms'. As one U.S. Ambassador stated in his report on Human Rights to the UN:

Americans speak from over 200 years of experience when we express our concern whenever fundamental liberties are suppressed. The United States has fought the battle for human rights and the dignity of humankind both at home and abroad, in war and peace . . . Ours is a country with global interests and a deep and abiding concern for the promotion of universal human rights in every country in the world. (Tahir-Kheli 3)

The vision of rights and freedom assumed by the United States in the Us vs. Them frame is painted as the normative centre, while that of those in those 'problem' states is viewed as abnormal, and even extreme: 'Lamentably, there are a few in the world who consider these aspirations . . . a threat to their own warped plans for humanity' (Noriega 1). President Bush's famous 'Axis of Evil' remarks in his 2002 State of the Union Address are a particularly strong example of this dialogical frame at work, taking the Us vs. Them concept so far as to place it literally in the religiously charged context of 'good and evil', with the United States fated to the task of dishing out 'justice' to 'evil-doers' anywhere and everywhere in the world that might threaten its national interests. Thus, despite the claim that the United States has no interest in imposing its culture on others, Us vs. Them and the kinds of action it tends to legitimate, is predicated on the notion that what is good and right for America is good and right for the rest of the world.

Us vs. Them often draws upon claims about women--both at home and abroad--that have long been used by those in power to explain and justify particular foreign policies. Just as European colonizers justified the domination and exploitation of other peoples by claiming to liberate native women from their base and oppressive cultures, the bad treatment of women in other countries today is used to justify 'regime change' at the hands of the United States and its allies. As always, the protection of women's virtue, whether at home or abroad, is a sure-fire justification for war and domination (Elshtain 1995). However, at the same time, the Us vs. Them frame also reformulates metaphors of gender in new ways. Rather than simply protecting the passive women of the American homefront (whose vulnerability is not only appropriate but to be expected) from a tangible foreign enemy, the American soldier (who now can also be a woman) is tasked with protecting the right of women everywhere to be empowered. As Bush proclaimed in his 2001 remarks to the United Nations, the invasion of Afghanistan was not just about ousting the Taliban and catching Bin Laden, but about ending the brutalization of Afghan women. In this way, U.S. military action is framed as an event of rescue and but also one

of solidarity. For, by throwing its might behind the women, the United States is presented as supporting the victims and therefore the ‘good’ side of the conflict. And yet the notion that the United States military could act as a medium for women’s liberation is deeply flawed and in fact contradictory. For rescue and solidarity are two very different things. While ‘rescue’ is often patronizing and undermining, ‘solidarity’ suggests a kind of empowerment. In reality, the idea that fighting terrorism is synonymous with liberating women is a kind of doublespeak, as it is not possible for the United States act in both of these ways simultaneously. As the women of Afghanistan themselves proclaimed prior to the invasion: ‘A vast and indiscriminate military attack on a country that has been facing permanent disasters for more than two decades will not be a matter of pride . . . The U.S. government and people should know that there is a vast difference between the poor and devastated people of Afghanistan and the Jihadi and Taliban criminals’ (Hawthorne and Winter 2002, 38). The result instead tends to be policies that while acted out in the name of women abroad, are far removed from these women’s control and even support.³

The Us vs. Them frame played a dominant role in the discourse around the United States’ involvement in Afghanistan following its invasion of the country in 2001. Beginning in November of that year, with a series of speeches and interviews about the anti-woman policies of the Taliban, a significant volume of discourse began to emerge from the White House and the Department of State, which emphasized the pro-women’s rights stance of the United States and contrasted this with the anti-woman attitudes of ‘those terrorists’ who would impose their barbaric ideals on the rest of us. In the months that followed, the Bush Administration made a very clear effort to link its activities in Afghanistan with a larger values-struggle, using the advancement of women as a key means of distinguishing a ‘civilized’ United States from the terrorists ‘out there’ and thereby justifying the toppling of the Taliban regime. After September 11th issues of culture, religion and political rights became the sites of a perceived ideological clash between ‘civilisation’ and ‘barbarism’, and ‘women’s rights’ a focus of renewed attention (Ferguson 2005; Shepherd 2006; Tickner 2002). Our Freedom (which included the emancipation of our women) became the explanation for why ‘they’ hated us. Meanwhile, after being virtually ignored for years Afghan women were suddenly thrown into the international limelight, as the embodiment of the backwards and barbaric reality that Al Queda fanatics were allegedly seeking to impose on the entire world. As First Lady Laura Bush proclaimed in her 2001 radio address to the nation: ‘The brutal oppression of women is a central goal of the terrorists . . . In Afghanistan, we see the world the terrorists would like to impose on the rest of us’ (qtd. in Khattak 221). In this vein, the Bush Administration began to speak of women’s emancipation as though it were part and parcel of the War on Terror, with Bush insisting on September 20th, 2001 that ‘the fight against terrorism is also a fight for the rights and dignity of women’ (1). However, despite these claims, whether or not such acts actually represented any kind of true solidarity or support for these women is highly questionable.

³ Muslim women throughout the world strongly opposed the U.S. attacks on Afghanistan, arguing that these were only likely to result in further destruction and death for Muslim women, both directly by American bombs and indirectly by the backlash against the West and anything associated with it likely to result in response.

The Active Leader

Another important dialogical frame utilised in official U.S. foreign policy discourse in reference to 'women's rights' is that of 'The Active Leader'. Within such a frame, the Bush Administration claims to be a kind of 'rights crusader', that seeks in an almost messianic way to spread human rights values (read: women's rights) around the world. In this sense U.S. foreign policy following September 11th was seen not just as a logical response to an attack on American soil, but rather as the product of an almost fated 'higher calling', by which the United States must defend the core values of Western Civilisation for the betterment of all humankind. As the President himself proclaimed in his 2002 State of the Union address: 'In a single instant we realised that this will be a decisive decade in the history of liberty, that we've been called to a unique role in human events . . . Our enemies embrace tyranny and death as a cause and creed. We stand for a different choice, made long ago, on the day of our founding' (3). Hence, like the Us vs. Them frame, the Active Leader relies on a series of assumptions about the moral legitimacy of the United States that is rooted in a particular national ideology, which claims that because Americans are the most freedom-loving people in the world, their government is the best suited to spread and protect freedom anywhere in the world: 'Our aim is a democratic peace – a peace founded upon the dignity and rights of every man and woman. America acts in this cause with friends and allies at our side, yet we understand our special calling: This great republic will lead the cause of freedom' (2004, 3).

The Active Leader frame has long been a part of the way U.S. foreign policy is framed and understood. During the Cold War, for example, the notion that the United States was the leader of 'The Free World' and fated with the task of defending it from Soviet Tyranny was fundamental to the way the United States conducted itself internationally. Under the Bush Administration, the Active Leader has often taken its shape according to the traditional masculinist tropes of the righteous hero or benevolent guardian. The case of human trafficking, wherein the American state has taken on the responsibility of both speaking for and rescuing victimised women around the world is one particular example of this.

However, the Active Leader has also taken on new dimensions under the Bush Administration, becoming at times far more amorphous. While sometimes the Active Leader behaves like the epitome of manly rationality and civic responsibility, he transforms at others to a more feminine form, as a thoroughly modern but very caring 'superwoman', who is capable of taking on anything and everything, and does just that, tirelessly leading the way for those others who are presumed to need the help. The 'superwoman' trope is especially evident in the way the Administration has sought to portray American women in the armed forces. While the dominant representation of the U.S. military since 2001 has been one of overwhelming masculinity, those women who have made the news have tended to reinforce the notion that like the U.S. government, the American military also has a feminine side—which is nimble and 'caring' as well as professional. Thus, in a manner similar to the Us vs. Them frame, the Active Leader is in many ways legitimated by a particular construction of women's liberation. Like 'Democracy', women's advancement is seen as a fundamental value that the United States is morally bound to spread around the world. However, in this case women's

liberation is framed far less in terms of being threatened, but rather in an optimistic fashion. Women at ‘home’ within America are seen less as vulnerable and in need of protection, but rather as models for what other women the world over can aspire to be, while empowered women abroad are treated as evidence that U.S. foreign policies on women’s rights are both correct and working.

The Active Leader frame has played a prominent role in a number of U.S. foreign policies under the Bush Administration, from relatively small and low profile programs aimed at providing American expertise and training to women leaders from foreign countries to an array of economic development initiatives aimed at fostering an ‘American-style entrepreneurial spirit’ in women around the world. In each of these cases, it is claimed that ‘the United States is the champion of human rights and the well being of women and minorities worldwide’, and that as a result, pro-woman measures make up a fundamental component U.S. foreign policy (Palmerlee, ‘Creating’ 1). One of the biggest examples of the Active Leader frame can be seen in the U.S. policy on human trafficking. On this particular issue, the Bush Administration has framed itself as the world’s leading anti-trafficking advocate, taking on the problem everywhere through a wide range of foreign policy initiatives, and engaging both via international institutions and through bilateral negotiations to criminalise and prosecute traffickers. In both written reports and numerous speeches, the U.S. presents human trafficking as one of the most atrocious human rights violations in existence, and one that ‘must stop’ (Ely-Raphel 1). As the Active Leader, it is presumed, the United States is not only able to set an example for how human trafficking ought to be addressed (by ‘rescuing’, liberating and rehabilitating women throughout the world via the coordinated efforts of American law enforcement and women’s aid groups), but is the appropriate figure to judge others on their anti-trafficking activities (or lack of them). Consequently, in addition to extensive diplomatic activities, the Bush Administration has published annual ‘Trafficking in Persons Reports’ that assess every state in the world (but unsurprisingly not the U.S.) on the issue of human trafficking, giving each country a rating which is then tied to aid funding, punishing those countries that fail to meet the Administration’s standards.

The Moral Community

When President George W. Bush’s first entered office, the foreign policy he advocated was in many ways unilateralist and isolationist, encouraging the United States to pull back from its involvement in a large number of international programmes and initiatives (Daalder and Lindsay). However, soon after the attacks on September 11th, this trend reversed and a third important dialogical frame emerged as an important theme in U.S. foreign policy rhetoric on women’s rights—the Moral Community. According to this frame, the United States is presented as being a good participant in an international community that is defined by the shared value of Freedom—free markets, free elections, and to some degree, personal liberty. While the United States is almost always presented as being an essential leader in this community, the dialogical frame of the Moral Community is distinct from the Active Leader because it emphasizes to a far greater degree a sense of connectivity between the United States and its fellows: ‘The people of the world are inexorably linked, in today’s world, that which touches some touches all’ (Beers 1). The war on terrorism throws this connectivity into sharp relief. As one Administration representative noted: ‘On September 11, our innocence ended, and we

entered the post-post-Cold War world, a period when increasingly potent transnational challenges intersect with still important traditional concerns. The attacks were a grim reminder of how the march of globalization has raised the stakes from transnational threats' (Haass 2). At the same time, the Moral Community is diverse, including friends throughout the world of many different ethnicities and faiths. Throughout the community, a concern for the human rights of women is treated as an essential and defining expression of the kinds of freedoms that link together its members:

Protecting human rights is an integral part of belonging to the global community. And women's rights are human rights...It is at the core of building a civil-law abiding society, which is an indispensable prerequisite for true democracy. (Palmerlee, 'Women' 1)

In such a configuration, the individual liberty of women is seen as essentially connected to Freedom writ-large, within the marketplace, the society and the political sphere, and thus as a result, it is seen both as a necessary step in achieving these broader goals, and as evidence that they are being achieved. In the Moral Community, this particular 'respect for women' becomes part of the civilisation that members of the community purport to share.

The Moral Community also takes its imagined shape according to specific metaphors of gender. In late 2001, the Moral Community first emerged in the discourse of the Bush Administration as having many of the attributes of the Wild West, with the Bush Administration acting as the hyper-masculine 'sheriff'. Drawing a great deal from the language of the Western movie genre, Bush proclaimed to be getting 'tough' on terrorism and bringing justice down; he stated, on September 24th, 2001, that Bin Laden was wanted 'dead or alive' and that the United States would 'smoke [Al Queda] out of their caves and get them running' (5). Just like the town marshal in the film *High Noon*, President Bush claimed to take up the job of passing down retribution to Al Queda as an act of duty because it was the right and necessary thing to do for the welfare of the whole community. However, in doing so, he demanded allegiance from its members, noting that if necessary the United States would act alone.⁴ Those who were not 'with us', it was implied, were 'against us' and therefore not legitimate members of the community but betrayers or outlaws. In accordance with this theme, the only appropriate solution for the Bush Administration was one of violence—a literal 'show down' with terrorism. In this way, the Moral Community at times takes on qualities of Us vs. Them. For, such crises force a literal redrawing of who is 'in' and who is 'out'.

However, even as President Bush made headlines with his tough 'cowboy' talk, the Administration's official discourse on the Moral Community also drew on less extreme versions of masculinity. The most important of these was that of the statesman. According to this metaphor, President Bush acts as a kind of world's diplomat who is assertive but also clever and prone to deal making and cooperation. Unlike the cowboy/sheriff, the statesman is an intellectual who emphasizes the complexity of international politics and his own expertise in being able to engage in the art of diplomacy. Examples of this metaphor abounded in the months immediately after

⁴ See *High Noon* (dir. Fred Zinneman, 1952).

September 11th, as the Bush Administration sought to emphasize the degree of international cooperation that was going into the military actions against Afghanistan, and once again in 2003 in its discussion of the ‘Coalition of the Willing’ to invade Iraq. Often used to hold off criticism of particular U.S. foreign policies, such as support for foreign leaders like the Saudi royal family or former President Musharraf of Pakistan, Bush would insist, as he did on September 16th, 2001, that we were acting along with our ‘many friends and allies’ in a complicated and multifaceted diplomatic front against the United States’ enemies. However the ‘cooperation’ and ‘dialogue’ emphasized by the statesman should not be confused with the feminine connotations of give and take. Rather, virtually all of the collaboration in War on Terror would be configured with the U.S. still ‘in charge’. It is significant that President Bush calls upon the world to ‘join us’ not for the world to ‘join together’ (‘Remarks’ September 16, 2001).

Whether President Bush is portrayed as a chivalrous cowboy or good mannered diplomat, women in the Moral Community are largely subjects rather than participants. For, even though the status of women is an important marker for membership in the Moral Community, and a point upon which its members are often galvanised, they are virtually absent as participants. Though on occasion women act as spokespersons (Condelezza Rice, who never deviates in the least from the White House’s formal stance on anything would even fall into this category), women within the Moral Community have no distinct voice, almost always affirming the (usually foregone) conclusions dictated by the many men ‘in charge’. Hence, in the lead up to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the only female voices recognised and given a platform were those that supported a military response (Hunt 2002).

The Moral Community was employed with a particular vehemence in the months following September 11th, 2001, when Bush began calling on the ‘civilized’ world (or ‘friends and allies’) to draw and defend its boundaries. As President Bush told the United Nations General Assembly in November of 2001: ‘This threat cannot be ignored. This threat cannot be appeased. Civilization, itself, the civilization we share, is threatened . . . The civilized world has to go after terrorism’ (2). By early 2002, it had become apparent that if the United States was going to beat Bin Laden, in the Middle East or anywhere else for that matter, it was going to be necessary for the Bush Administration to articulate a counter to Al Queda’s moral rhetoric. The place of women in society and politics—as an issue that not only encompasses questions of equality and liberty but that also tends to be seen as a marker of modernisation and progress—was the perfect subject upon which such a values debate (and with it, the debate over who was and was not civilised) could be focused. As a result, the status of a nation’s women quickly become a site for the affirmation of who is and is not part of the Moral Community: ‘The international coalition for the war on terrorism . . . stands for the safety, resolve and liberation of people in countries everywhere, especially for women’ (Beers 1). Of course, what this ‘liberation’ has meant in practice has been an entirely different matter altogether. Regardless of what the Bush Administration claims, the War on Terror is not the same thing as the struggle for women’s rights, and even in places like Afghanistan, where ‘women’s rights’ has figured so centrally, the results of this pairing have not been all good. Rather, many argue, the effect of the war there has been disastrous for many Afghan women and the United States’ efforts to empower them poorly suited to the actual realities of their lives (Daulatzai 2006; Kandiyoti 2005; Hunt 2002; Shepherd

2006).

'Gender Decoys' or Genuine Belief?

Many would argue that the Bush Administration's discursive references to 'women's rights' are nothing more than 'gender decoys'—attempts to confuse and mystify perceptions of its actual agendas, that while making claims for women's rights actually work to justify and uphold patriarchal structures that ultimately undermine such progress (Eisenstein 2006). Indeed, on at least one level, it is clear that in many ways the utilization of feminist language and concepts in U.S. foreign policy discourse during this period was a product of political calculations. From the moment George W. Bush was sworn in as the 43rd president of the United States, he was already disliked by feminists the world over. During his time as Governor of Texas, he had already established a political agenda that advocated traditional roles for women and strongly opposed long-time feminist causes such as the right to choose abortion and affirmative action. Thus, despite the effort to paint his campaign as one of 'compassionate conservatism', the lead-up to Bush's first term election was marked by protests by many feminists that his whole platform was 'anti-woman'. Throughout, and even following, his election in 2000, support for Bush among women voters remained abysmally low, with the 'gender gap' between male and female voters as high as it had ever been since the election of Ronald Reagan (Flanders 2005; Hutchings et al 2004).

In response, Bush made clear efforts from the very beginning to present himself as a 'pro-woman' candidate, from commenting on the achievement of greater equality between men and women as a significant step forward (Frum 2003), to sending high-profile female supporters, such as the First Lady and the infamous political handler Karen Hughes, around the country in a bid to draw the support of middle class, suburban women (Mitchell 2000). In the effort to appeal to women, the Bush Administration not only sought to address those issues it was believed these voters would be most concerned with, but to tailor the language of Presidential speeches and Administration statements in order to appeal to what was seen as a womanly sensibility (Frum 2003). When one takes such strategising into account, it is very likely that the inclusion of claims of support for liberal feminist ideals such as formal legal equality of the sexes, the defence of women's political rights and the promotion of women's economic independence were at least in part seen as a way of building support among the female electorate, especially those in the demographic Bush had the most difficulty reaching—single working women (Hutchings et al 2004).

Aside from appealing to women voters at home, the Bush Administration's references to women's rights in its foreign policy discourse also served political purposes abroad—the United States' need for international legitimacy. For, despite the unilateral tendencies of the Bush Doctrine, virtually all of the foreign policies pursued by the Bush Administration from 2001-2004 relied upon some degree of international sanction if not help. As a participant in the international system, the United States is subject to a variety of interdependent relationships—conceptually as well as practically--not only with other states, but with intergovernmental organisations and even non-governmental ones, from international advocacy groups to multi-national corporations. Inevitably, these interrelationships play an important role in setting the agenda of the United States' foreign policies and its discourse on them (Brown et al 2005). Much of this inter-

dependence comes from the norm-dependant nature of inter-state relations. For, whether the aim of a relationship is trade, security, or otherwise, all forms of international cooperation are fundamentally rooted in shared understandings and expectations. Within the international political system this is especially important, as membership to this 'community' of states can only be gained and affirmed by participation in certain institutions and values systems. In this community, legitimacy is not something to be taken for granted, but rather is subject to a certain 'universal' regime of ethics in which the rights of women increasingly figure prominently (Kerr 1993). For, since the rise of 'human security' and states' movement toward the practice of 'ethical' foreign policy, the emphasis throughout the international community has increasingly moved away from state sovereignty and toward states' responsibility to protect certain rights of civilians (Chandler 2003).

That the United States would seek to present itself in a certain way with regard to women's rights as a means of achieving international legitimacy is nothing new at all. As Steve Niva argues, examples of this particular kind of political manoeuvring date back to the end of the Cold War: 'The old bipolar configuration of global power and norms had given away to a new uni-polar world, in particular to renewed claims to universalism and benevolence, and grave proclamations of responsibility on the part of the United States. With the Gulf War, the United States asserted itself as the social paradigm for international society' (111). In this same way, one could argue, the Bush Administration has used certain claims about its respect for women and support for women's rights within its foreign policy discourse to 'prop up' its 'sagging' hegemony. For by making such claims, the Bush Administration was able to not only indicate its awareness of these issues, but to generate some of the political goodwill necessary for the United States to maintain its moral legitimacy as a 'world leader', even as it continued to insist upon its exceptionality, opposing a wide variety of international agreements, including CEDAW, and claiming itself to be exempt from long-established international norms for behaviour, from pre-emptive war to the Geneva Conventions.

On the surface of things, such politically motivated lip service to women's rights seems incredibly disingenuous, especially when one takes a full account of the many Bush Administration policies, both at home and abroad, that do undermine, if not harm, women. Nonetheless, the Bush Administration's adoption of certain feminist phrases and concepts should not be entirely dismissed as solely the result of political calculation. Rather, a reasonable case can be made that to at least some degree, these claims were also rooted in these figures' identities and beliefs.

Because identity mediates the way we see and interpret the world, references to identities in discourse not only act as rhetorical tools, but also reflect the ways policymakers actually understand things. Consequently, to at least some degree, rhetoric is always drawn from some aspect of genuine conviction, in so much as policymakers will always relate their arguments and claims to their own beliefs in a way that affirms their sense of individual and national self (Reus-Smit 2005). In addition to helping shape discourse, identity can also be influenced by it. For once certain concepts and phrases enter the lexicon of policymakers, they eventually begin to inform the way these individuals see not only the problems before them, but how they see their nation and in fact themselves. Or, to put it simply—say something enough times and you will likely

start to believe it. Once this happens, the influence of a particular identity becomes compounded and self-reinforcing.

David Campbell argues in a country where the national identity was constructed from the ground up in a relatively short period of time and where there is no common cultural ancestry of people and place, the imagined nation is centrally important for the United States. For certain, he contends, identities have always played an essential role in the political evolution of the United States. Americans' perception that theirs is a nation of great freedoms, unparalleled power, moral righteousness, global leadership, and economic strength is essential to the way they relate to the rest of the world. Elements of these beliefs can be found everywhere in U.S. foreign policy discourse, including those speech acts that make reference to feminist concepts and language. They figure prominently in each of dialogical frames of Us vs. Them, the Active Leader and the Moral Community.

Ultimately, when one takes into account the co-constitutive nature of identity and U.S. foreign policy, it is not only logical but to be expected that on at least some level, key policymakers see themselves as being in favour of women's rights and the United States as a legitimate model for women's empowerment that is worthy of export. Hence, even though the Bush Administration may not share the same agenda as most feminists and might even be hostile to it, it is inaccurate to discount its use of at least certain feminist concepts and language as being entirely strategic and disconnected from any real concern for women. Rather, in many ways, the Bush Administration's professed pro-women's rights stance can be attributed to a genuine belief in the goodness of certain kinds of individual 'fundamental' freedoms to which all people ought to be entitled—such freedoms as President Bush extolled in his 2002 National Security Strategy:

The United States must defend liberty and justice because these principles are right and true for all people everywhere . . . America must defend the nonnegotiable demands of human dignity: the rule of law; limits on the absolute power of the state; free speech; freedom of worship; equal justice; *respect for women*; religious and ethnic tolerance; and respect for private property [emphasis added]. (*National Security Strategy* 2002, 3)

In the end, though a great deal of foreign policy develops as a result of strategic calculations, it is not only reasonable but undeniable that identity and belief also play important roles in shaping how leaders both think and speak about it. While the Bush Administration had clear motivations to appeal to the sympathies of both women at home and others in the international community, it is not unreasonable to believe that in at least some sense, these many statements were also impacted by their convictions. President Bush and those who represent him see themselves and their country as being modern, civilised, and benevolent—working for the greater wellbeing and good of people around the world, including women. Their belief in promoting Freedom—free markets, political freedom, and personal liberty (with a few notable exceptions, such as gay marriage and abortion)—is central to this. As a result, even though those in the Bush Administration would hardly characterise themselves as being feminists, they were perfectly willing to adopt feminist-influenced language and concepts, when doing so furthered their sense of self and nation.

In conclusion, while the Bush Administration clearly drew upon a foundation of language and issues that were first and foremost established by the women's movement, the result was not necessarily a 'feminist' foreign policy. Ironically, even as the Bush Administration claimed to be promoting the empowerment and advancement of women, it often relied on metaphors and symbolic meanings rooted in long-standing gender stereotypes. In many cases, these assumptions had an undermining effect. Similarly, at the concrete level, it is unclear whether the claims made were ever actually backed up with genuine and legitimate action. Ultimately, the kind of 'liberation' advocated was always situated within a particular pre-existing moral and philosophical framework, and the actions taken to achieve it within the context of other, larger foreign policies. Hence, whenever mainstream feminist demands or claims clearly came into conflict with this framework, the result was either vague and non-specific language, or outright silence (it should be noted that the Bush Administration never once bragged about cutting funds for international family planning programmes, nor about its continuing failure to sign on to CEDAW). As a result, a strong case can be made that on at least some occasions, pro-women's rights language was used as a proxy measure for the furthering of other political agendas. In any case, for all the Administration's 'talk' of promoting 'the full and equal participation of women in all aspects of life' (Powell 2002: 1) there remained a tension between the Bush Administration's discursive claims and the actual, practical ends of the policies to which such statements were usually attached.

Nonetheless, it is unlikely that the claims the Bush Administration made about women's rights were entirely disingenuous. In judging their validity, one must also take into account the roles of identity and belief. In many cases, the Administration's 'pro-women's rights' rhetoric may have been tied to genuine conviction. In these situations, the potential for an effective and meaningful impact on U.S. foreign policy was and remains significant. Indeed, the fact that many feminist concerns even entered the discourse at all during the period of 2001-2004, when both the President and majority party were openly hostile to the feminist movement, is evidence that the paradigm for what 'counts' in international politics and on what basis foreign policy ought to be made is already shifting, and with this shift, policymakers are now beginning incorporate new viewpoints into their considerations and speech. The question now, is how we as feminists ought to take these gains and utilize these discursive openings in the best way possible to bring about a greater coherence between speech and action, so that politicians not only talk of feminism but incorporate its principles and values into the real substance of their policies.

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