

THE AMERICAN HERO M/F

A Critical Discourse Analysis of Gender Identities in Obama's 'War on
Terror'



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Introduction

During the early days of the Nixon Administration, Attorney General John Mitchell told the press: “Don’t watch what we say, watch what we do” (Safire, 1988) However, in order to get a fuller understanding of politics, what politicians say is extremely important. The language of politics is a very intricate system, with many aims and purposes.

The strand of poststructuralist work in International Relations studies this language and aims at understanding the discursive relationship between language and behaviour, or language and identity, for example. A key topic of interest herein is the study of the ‘war on terror’.

Scholars such as Croft (2006) and Jackson (2005) have examined the language used by the Bush Administration to describe the 9/11-attacks and the consequent ‘war on terror’, which has included most notably the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 and the invasion of Iraq in 2003. The study of the ‘war on terror’ discourse has illuminated the ways in which language has been deployed by the Bush Administration in order to justify and normalize the policies that constitute the material side of the ‘war on terror’ (Jackson, 2005, p. 1). The ‘war on terror’ boils down to several very fundamental binary oppositions, such as ‘good Americans’ vs ‘evil terrorists’. Through various rhetorical strategies and imagery, the Bush Administration has perpetually emphasized this binary in order to sell the ‘war on terror’ to the people.

One of the key scholars of feminism in the field of International Relations, J. Ann Tickner, has argued that in the ‘war on terror’ discourse, more so than in other discourses of war, gender images and gender stereotypes have been employed to justify state violence against a non-state aggressor (Tickner, 2002, p. 348). She furthermore explains that “since the “war on terrorism” began, our images of men and women, as warriors and victims, have

become more rigid” (2002, p. 342). Writing in 2002, Tickner bases her alarming conclusion on the discourse as presented by the Bush Administration in the immediate aftermath of the 9/11-attacks. Since the attacks, fifteen years have passed and another president has almost completed his two terms. As President Obama is a self-proclaimed feminist, it is necessary and interesting to examine the ways in which these traditional and fixed gender images play a role in Obama’s version of the ‘war on terror’ narrative. However, to this date the research on this is meagre, with the notable exception of Landreau (2011).

This paper examines gender identities and gender stereotypes in the ‘war on terror’ discourse. The main question which this paper will attempt to answer is how the Obama Administration has employed these gender identities in the ‘war on terror’ discourse to justify and normalise military action. To answer this question, I will examine the literature on the topic of the use of gender by the Bush Administration in the ‘war on terror’ discourse and illuminate several theories that explain this process. Then, I will perform a Critical Discourse Analysis of speeches by President Obama, or other members of the Obama Administration, to highlight the role of gender identities in the rhetoric of the administration. This study effectively has two main aims. The first aim is to illuminate the process in which gender identities are employed to create consent amongst the public in order to justify and normalise state violence. Secondly, this study aims at illumination the process of the construction and reconstruction of gender and sexuality norms through discursive practices. This may also unveil gender identities rendered invisible in the Bush Administration’s rhetoric, as well as illuminate new, alternative, identities discursively constructed under President Obama.

Literature Review

One recurrent theme in poststructuralist feminism is the construction of the relationship between masculinity and politics (Tickner, 1992, p. 4). Tickner (1992) writes that throughout history, men have been the main actors in the field of politics, and have therefore shaped the way we perceive politics and International Relations (p. 4). The traditional characteristics of masculinity, such as power, braveness, chivalry, and strength have become normalized as the way international politics should be conducted. It is therefore that a close connection has been constructed between masculinity and power, or violence, which is very problematic for feminist scholars (Beckman, 2002, p. 27). The social construction of men as violent has been used as a justification for violence in the international arena. Also, different varieties of masculinity have been rendered invisible or deviant in the discourse of international politics.

The notion that gender is fluid and plural is essential to poststructuralist feminists. Gender, like identity, is not fixed and is open to change over time (Butler, 1999, p. 179). Therefore, categories as 'male,' 'female,' 'masculine,' and 'feminine' pose problems, because they fix certain meanings to these words, which excludes alternative interpretations (Khalid, 2011, p. 16). Also, by talking about gender in essentialist terms, the underlying power relations are camouflaged.

Examining discourse from a feminist perspective shows how gender identities are constructed, and which gender identities are deemed normal, and which are rendered invisible. Also, it can unveil how gender is used as a "standard of normalization", when making connections within the discourse between the dominant gender identities and the preferred objectives of the discourse (Khalid, 2011, p. 16). Furthermore, the study of gendered discourses reveals underlying power relations, by illuminating who is deemed victim or villain (Khalid, 2011, p. 29). In this study, adopting a feminist perspective on the

language of the 'war on terror' allows for a critical assessment of the discursive processes of justification and normalization of state violence. Secondly, an analysis through a feminist perspective contributes to the understanding of the underlying power relations associated with gender identities.

Gender in the Bush Administration

A major rhetorical component of the 'war on terror' discourse is the use of gendered language to emphasize the binary oppositions that have been employed to justify and normalize the violence in the 'war on terror'. Many feminist scholars, both from the sociological and the IR perspective have researched the gendered language of the 'war on terror' discourse (Bhattacharyya, 2008; Ferguson, 2005; Shepherd, 2006). Additionally, orientalist scholars have illustrated how this gendered language has been employed to serve the construction of the binary opposition between the 'good Americans' and the 'evil terrorists' (Khalid, 2011; Nayak, 2006). The Bush Administration has not merely employed gendered language in the 'war on terror', but has preferred several distinct types of masculinities and femininities.

There are three main recurrent gender stereotypes that can be identified within the 'war on terror' discourse. These are the American Hero, the Muslim Martyr, and the Veiled Victim (from Ferguson, 2005; Khalid, 2011; Shepherd, 2006; Tickner, 2002). These gender stereotypes have been very prominent in the 'war on terror' discourse, and recur throughout written and spoken texts by different members of the Bush Administration. The following section will outline the characteristics of each of the stereotypes and their roles within the grand narrative of the 'war on terror'.

This first recurrent stereotype is that of the American Hero. The main features of this American Hero are benevolence, chivalry, and a traditional, Western interpretation of masculinity. The American Hero is exclusively male, and female examples of heroes are quickly masculinized or otherwise misrepresented in the discourse (Shepherd, 2006, p. 24; Khalid, 2011, p. 25). This is necessary because the American Hero image is vital to the justification of violence in the 'war on terror'. This American Hero exemplifies the 'good Americans' side of the binary opposition between 'good Americans' and 'evil terrorists' employed by the 'war on terror' discourse (Jackson, 2005, p. 79). The aspect of chivalry is critical to this image, as the main purpose of the American Hero is to defend their mothers, sisters, and daughters at home, whilst at the same time save the Veiled Victims from the terrorists' hands.

The image of the American Hero is not novel, nor is its use limited to the 'war on terror' discourse. This image is deeply embedded in American cultural grammar and American identity. Whilst there are many categories of American heroes, the American Hero in the 'war on terror' discourse is mostly based on the historical image of the Frontier Hero. The Frontier Hero, according to *American Masculinities: A Historical Masculinity*, is centered around the opposition between white civilization vs the wild frontier (Carroll, 2003, p. 206). This champion who faces the wild frontier lands with the aim of bringing civilization to the borderlands is the Frontier Hero (Carroll, 2003, p. 488). He is exclusively white, and as Gibbon (2002) writes, "men of modest education but brave and self-reliant" (p. 20). The image of the Frontier Hero is therefore easily translated into the contemporary 'war on terror' discourse, as the terrorist enemy is also characterized as being uncivilized, unsocial, and acting from an organization rather than a state.

Women in power and in the military have had their femininity largely rendered invisible. They have often been portrayed as less feminine and adopting more masculine traits

in the 'war on terror' discourse (Shepherd, 2006, p. 24). Examples of women who have been attributed masculine features in order to support the dominant narrative are former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, and Megan Ambuhl and Lynndie England, key perpetrators in the Abu Ghraib scandal (Shepherd, 2006, p. 24).

This construction of the American Hero plays into the earlier discussed construction of the relationship between masculinity and violence. The main characteristics of the American Hero relate this image to the idea of securitization. The link between 'good men' and 'legitimate violence' therefore establishes a symbolic representation of the American Hero as the American security state (Shepherd, 2006, p. 21). Jackson (2005) furthermore writes that "U.S. foreign policy and political culture is deeply and inherently masculinized, and the militarized approach to the 'war on terrorism' is simply a reflection of this dominant trait" (p. 157). The constructed relationship between this type of masculinity and legitimate state violence therefore serves to justify the counterterrorism violence. Whilst mentioned before that the relationship between masculinity and violence is very problematic, it has become so embedded in American cultural grammar that the symbolic relationship is perpetually reiterated.

One important theory which combines this construction of the relationship between masculinity and violence and the protection of American values is the "logic of masculinist protection" (Young, 2003). This theory argues that the state authority can be discursively constructed by allusions to family life. The "masculine role of protector" in a family illustrates the protective role of the security state (Young, 2003, p. 2). This also means that the role of women and children is inherently subordinate to that of our masculine protector, the American Hero. The Bush Administration has actively used the protection of innocents (women and children) to justify counterterrorism and foreign policies and expanding U.S. power abroad by adopting a stern and dominant father figure role (Young, 2003, p. 10).

The second stereotype of masculinity employed in the 'war on terror' discourse is that of the Muslim Martyr. The image of the Muslim Martyr is constructed in contrast to the American Hero. Both the American Hero and the Muslim Martyr are centered around the concept of self-sacrifice. However, in the American 'war on terror' discourse the American Hero's sacrifice is positively characterized, whilst the Muslim Martyr's sacrifice is portrayed very negatively. Furthermore, the Muslim Martyr is typically bearded, barbaric, and very anti-women (Khalid, 2011, p. 23; Gerami, 2005, p. 449). The Muslim Martyr's masculinity is portrayed as deviant and opposite to the masculinity of the American Hero. He is even portrayed in instances as animalistic and brutal; a process of dehumanization. This also plays into the relationship between violence and masculinity, as his masculinity is one that cannot be contained, or feral. By portraying the Muslim Martyr as inhuman, the actions of the American Hero can be written into the grander narrative of bringing a new and common humanity to the deviant societies (Shepherd, 2006, p. 20)

Besides being uncivilized, the other main feature of the Muslim Martyr is his disrespect toward women and disregard for women's rights. This notion is very closely related to the image of the Veiled Victim, who embodies the object of the Muslim Martyr's irrational and deviant behavior. The construction of the Muslim Martyr as hateful of women establishes a link between the discourse and security. Through this construction, it is necessary for the American Hero to protect the Veiled Victim by showing the Muslim Martyr how to treat women (Khalid, 2011, p. 23). This has also contributed to the justification of instruments of torture during the Bush Administration (Butler, 2008, p. 17).

As shown earlier, the American Hero embodies the idea of legitimate (state) violence. In the same vein, the Muslim Martyr is constructed as the embodiment of illegitimate violence. This construction is supported by the recurrent emphasis on his uncivilized nature, his link to (Islamist) terrorist organizations, and characterized by his active disrespect of

women's rights. This extensive focus on disrespect of women's rights serves to symbolize the grander construction of the Muslim Martyr as standing in stark disregard of human rights as a whole, democracy, and in general all American values the American Hero fights for.

The final gender stereotype is the Veiled Victim. The Veiled Victim is a stereotypical depiction of the Afghan and Iraqi woman, wearing a burqa, helpless, and dominated by men (Khalid, 2011; Tickner, 2002; Shepherd, 2006). The name Veiled Victim refers not only to the wearing of the hijab or the burqa, but also to the ways in which she has been rendered invisible and devoid of agency by the 'war on terror' discourse.

The lack of agency is based on the construction of the 'war on terror' discourse around the narrative of what Khalid calls the "saving brown women scenario" (Khalid, 2011; Bhattacharyya, 2008). This scenario is not exclusively invented for the 'war on terror' but has been part of a grander colonial context of Western imperialist powers pretending to save women from oppressive indigenous societies (Mahmood, 2009, p. 193). The image of the Veiled Victim is used to invoke empathy for the women and anger against the injustice amongst the American public, especially women voters (Ferguson, 2005, p. 10).

The image of the Veiled Victim is symbolic for the pursuit of democratization and instalment of Western values in other societies. The fight for women's rights is repeatedly recalled in order to establish the need for democratization in Afghanistan and Iraq. This constructed relationship has been reiterated so often that the link between the fight for women's rights and the pursuit of democratization have become inextricably linked (Ferguson, 2005, p. 18). Ferguson (2005) pointedly summarizes: "if rights are important, it is because international peace requires the recognition of rights: even as Americans lead the cause of freedom, they do so with the aim of creating a democratic peace" (p. 27).

This construction between women's rights and democracy is very problematic. It obscures the fact that democracy does not secure or guarantee women's rights. It posits both

concepts as stable and fixed, whilst there is not fixed notion of women's rights or democracy (Ferguson, 2005, p. 30). Furthermore, it might obscure any progress there is to be made on the respect of women's rights within the United States, as it establishes women's rights as something which is already achieved. Lastly, this discourse obscures the negative effect that militarization and violence has on the security of women in conflict areas (Ferguson, 2005, p. 32). Therefore, the image of the Veiled Victim and the ensuing discourse is centered around obscuring, rendering invisible, and camouflaging (Khalid, 2011, p. 28).

President Obama: Research and Expectations

Barack Obama's presidential election campaign in 2008 was characterized by the notion of 'change'. One of the policies of the Bush Administration that Barack Obama promised to change was the 'war on terror'. His campaign promised change to the policies and rhetoric of the 'war on terror', to make the war "smarter, better, nimbler, stronger" (quoted in McCrisken, 2011, p. 781). However, much evidence suggest that the policies have not changed significantly, and that whilst voters might have been persuaded to think otherwise, Obama has never promised to end the 'war on terror' (McCrisken, 2011, p. 781). Obama's main purpose was to shift the focus of the 'war on terror' in order to make it more effective and successful, by renouncing the Guantanamo Bay facility and the invasion of Iraq. However, the actual 'war on terror' never weakened and the objective always remained to find and prosecute terrorists.

So, whilst the President Obama has mainly stayed on course, his election rhetoric suggested a shift in the narrative of the 'war on terror', in an attempt to "effect ideological change" (McCrisken, 2011, p. 782). The change of administration constituted a power vacuum, in which President Obama could effect change. However, contrary to expectations,

the narrative has not changed much. Main scholars on the 'war on terror' discourse as deployed by the Obama Administration have detected little to no change (McCracken, 2011; Jackson, 2011; King, 2014). Whilst seeming big changes have been made in the 'war on terror' discourse, such as renouncing the name 'war on terror' in 2009 and the abandoning of the color-coded terrorist threat system, there have been little change to the fundamental binary oppositions and constructions of identity (McCracken, 2011; Jackson, 2011).

Interestingly, very limited research exists on the 'war on terror' discourse by the Obama Administration have focused on the use of gendered language and gender stereotypes. In August 2016, President Obama published an article in *Glamour Magazine*, in which he expresses his views on gender and gender identity. He writes that "as far as we [have] come, all too often are we still boxed in by stereotypes about how men and women should behave" (Obama, 2016f). This quote really emphasizes the fundamental difference between President Bush and President Obama, as Obama has always presented himself as a feminist as well as someone who believes that identity (be it gender, racial, or other) is flexible, and "an ongoing construction" rather than a fixed entity (Shaw & Watson, 2011). This is important, because in combination with his devotion to changing the narrative of the 'war on terror', this presents an important field of study.

Jackson (2011), King (2014) and McCracken (2011) have been adamant that changing the narrative of the 'war on terror' is a near impossible task. King has argued that the a good rhetoric needs to rely on stereotypes and assumptions that are familiar to the public, which makes introducing new narratives and identities problematic in order to substantiate the necessity of the continuation of the 'war on terror' (King, 2014, p. 9). Another problem that presents itself in precisely the fact that the identities and stereotypes invoked in the narrative have been justifying and normalizing the 'war on terror'. Rejecting these identities would

pose the issue of finding a new way, or new language, to justify foreign policy and policies of counterterrorism (Jackson, 2011, p. 9).

But there is still hope. Many of the feminist scholars writing on the 'war on terror' discourse employed by the Bush Administration have presented alternative approaches to the use of gendered language and the breaking of gender stereotypes (Tickner, 2002; Eisenstein, 2007). The following chapter will entail a close examination of the language of the 'war on terror' discourse as employed by the Obama Administration. The specific focus of the Critical Discourse Analysis will be the use of gendered language and gender stereotypes, to see if President Obama has indeed be able to effect a change and introduce new identities into the 'war on terror' discourse, or has relied on the existing stereotypes offered by the Bush Administration. Either change or continuity in the narrative of the 'war on terror' will contribute to a greater understanding of President Obama's construction of the 'war on terror', as well as his ability to open the public to more fluid and plural gender identities, and to change the expectations of how men and women should behave.

Research Design and Methodology

Critical Discourse Analysis

The study of language in International Relation has gained increasingly more prominence with the rise of poststructuralist theory. According to Hansen (2014), “language is how we make sense of the world” (p. 172). Therefore, the language of politicians offer the public and insight in how the world’s powerhouses make sense of global issues and events. Ever more so, studying the language of International Relations also shows how reality is constructed in the international arena. Poststructuralist theory is grounded in a postpositivist epistemology, which means poststructuralist believe that reality is socially constructed.

In order to illuminate how politicians socially construct, for example, reality, events, and identity, and to uncover the underlying power relations, poststructuralist examines discourses. A discourse, according to Michel Foucault, father of poststructuralism, is “a linguistic systems that order statements and concepts” (quoted in Hansen, 2014, p. 172). The study of discourses in International Relations, therefore, can illuminate who and what is included or excluded, and that reveals its importance. Jackson (2005) beautifully formulates the need for academia to watch what politicians are saying as “the deployment of language by politicians is an exercise of power and without rigorous public interrogation and critical examination, unchecked power inevitably becomes abusive” (p. 3). Therefore, the study of discourse can serve as gaining understanding in the ways in which reality is constructed by those who control the discourse.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a specific type of discourse analysis which aims at examining the macro and micro linguistic properties of texts and speeches within a specific discourse, in order to reveal constructed and reiterated power relations. (van Dijk, 1993) CDA differs from other types of discourse analysis in that it has as an objective to

emancipate, and that it addresses power inequality and injustice, as well as the abuse of power (van Dijk, 1993, p. 252) Therefore, the main aim of CDA can be formulated as “change through critical understanding” or “critical language awareness” (van Dijk, 1993, p. 252; Jorgensen and Philips, 2002, p. 88). Hence, CDA is a most suitable method for answering my research question and achieving the aims of this study.

Text selection

The texts selected for this study range from the date of President Obama’s inauguration (January 20, 2009) until July 2016. Obama’s presidency has largely been characterized by the continuation of the ‘war on terror’, in all but name. Whilst the Obama Administration has rejected the use of the term ‘war on terror’, I will continue to use this term in my research because it serves as an umbrella term for the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq in 2001 and 2003, the current counterterrorism efforts against ISIL, operations in, for example, Yemen and Cameroon, the use of drones in AfPak, and the discursive dimension of counterterrorism in the United States.¹

At his inauguration, the United States was involved in active military combat in both Afghanistan and Iraq, in order to fight the terrorist organisation of Al-Qaeda. In The first quarter of 2009, there were 32,500 troops deployed in Afghanistan, and 148,500 troops deployed in Iraq (Peters, Schwartz, and Kapp 2016). President Obama also inherited the Department of Homeland Security, the governmental organisation founded by his predecessor in the aftermath of the 9/11-attacks. In his presidential election campaign, President Obama opposed the invasion of Iraq, but supported the invasion of Afghanistan. Consequently, he argued for the total withdrawal of troops from Iraq. Obama argued that the

¹ AfPak is the term used by the Obama Administration to signify the combined region of Afghanistan and Pakistan. The use of the term in and of itself suggests that Afghanistan and Pakistan are viewed by the Obama Administration as one entity in U.S. foreign policy (Prados 2009).

operation in Iraq had been distracting from the true goals of the campaign against Al-Qaeda. During the first years of his presidency, Obama stayed true to his promise of withdrawing the troops from Iraq, which was fully accomplished in 2011. The number of troops in Afghanistan, on the other hand, were largely increased shortly after Obama's inauguration, and withdrawal of U.S. troops there only started after the killing of Al-Qaeda's leader and figurehead, Osama Bin Laden. Osama Bin Laden was found and killed by U.S. Navy SEALs on May 2, 2011. The withdrawal of the U.S. troops slowly started after this and was finalized in 2014. However, after the resurgence of the Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan, there are now still 9,800 U.S. troops stationed in Afghanistan.

As the military efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq mainly characterized the President Obama's first term in office, his second term saw a renewed surge in counterterrorist policy. In 2014, the United States launched an attack against its new target in the 'war on terror': ISIL. The self-proclaimed Islamic States of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), also known as ISIS, IS, or Daesh, had gained influence in the Syria and Iraq. In an effort to combat ISIL, the U.S. commenced with airstrikes in the region, an operation that would later be called Operation Inherent Resolve. The operation, in cooperation with NATO allies, is still ongoing and is the focus of much of the U.S.'s foreign policy efforts, as well as a catalyst in the worsening of relations between the U.S. and Russia.

The other events which characterized the 'war on terror' during the Obama administration were the (alleged) terrorist attacks by Al-Qaeda and, later, ISIL. Notable events that have been connected to terrorism in the U.S. were, chronologically: the Boston Marathon, Charleston, San Bernardino, Orlando, and many minor incidents. However, it is the events related to terrorism in Europe and North Africa that have been much more influential in shaping history during Obama's second term. The main events related to terrorist activity were: Charlie Hebdo, the Paris attacks, the attack on the airport and subway

in Brussels, and Nice in Europe. In North Africa, the attacks on the Bardo Museum and on the beach in Tunisia have left a great impact. A few years prior, the 2012 Benghazi attacks has been of great influence on U.S. foreign policy and has remained a controversial topic in the 2016 U.S. presidential elections.

Much of the texts chosen for my analysis are related to either the military ‘war on terror’ in Iraq and Afghanistan, or are responses to domestic or international (alleged) terrorist attacks. This choice has mainly been fueled by the aim of this research, which is to uncover the ways in which the gendered language in these speeches has been used to normalise the ‘war on terror’ for the public. These speeches, in my opinion, are all directed at, and intended for, large audiences, and therefore can best illuminate the processes at hand.

The choice for looking at the Obama Administration rather than simply President Obama is a conscious choice. Like Ferguson (2005), I include texts by other highly placed officials within the Administration, because they can illuminate “the position of the administration as a whole” rather than falling in the trap of writing about what one individual thinks or feels (p. 17).

Obama: American Hero or Leader of the Daddy State?

Because Obama had promised a break in policy and rhetoric from his predecessor in his 2008 election campaign, and most notably a “less authoritarian leadership style in the global community”, it is a fair starting point for the analysis of role of the myth of masculine protection in Obama’s international security and counterterrorism discourse (Landreau, 2011, p. 2).

Overall, Obama still relies heavily on the logic of masculine protection and therefore also relies on the role of the American Hero in the ‘war on terror’ discourse in order to justify state violence. In the ‘war on terror’ discourse we recognise in Obama Bush’s muscular masculinity for precisely this reason, and also the idea of the father figure. However, Obama also at times represents a more compassionate masculinity, and this is especially evident in his representation of the father figure.

In his State of the Union of 2016, Obama’s reliance on the myth of masculine protection is quite overtly states as he says that the U.S. national “[p]riority number one is **protecting the American people** and going after terrorist networks” (Obama, 2016a). By combining the notion of protecting as his topmost priority in the same sentence as mentioning terrorist network, this enforces the idea that terrorism is the number one threat to U.S. national security. This is also emphasised in all of Obama’s Addresses at the State of the Union, which all feature counterterrorism or the ‘war on terror’ as the first priority their sections on foreign policy issues. It also reinforces Obama’s authority as the protector of the people, and recursively justifies and authorizes the use of hard power and military means to fight these terrorist networks, as this phrase introduces Obama’s call to action which follows very soon after as he calls on Congress to “authorize the use of military force against ISIL” (Obama, 2016a). So here Obama discursively establishes his role as the President of the U.S.

as a protector, and the terrorist network of ISIL as something the U.S. citizens need to be protected from.

Similar to Bush's narrative, the American Hero stereotype supports Obama's reliance on the logic of narrative protection. Therefore this stereotype is often represented in the 'war on terror' discourse in many speeches covering a multitude of subtopics within the 'war on terror' discourse. The following table shows the perpetuation of the most important characteristics of the American Hero in the discourse of the Obama Administration:

<p>“heroic” “I see it in the soldier who gives almost everything to save his brothers” (Obama, 2016a)</p> <p>“good, courageous, heroic Americans” (Brennan, 2009)</p> <p>“their courage, grit and perseverance” “our courageous wounded warriors” (Obama, 2009e)</p> <p>“I'm responsible for the deployment of thousands of young Americans to battle in a distant land. Some will kill, and some will be killed.”</p> <p>“The soldier's courage and sacrifice is full of glory, expressing devotion to country, to cause, to comrades in arms.” (Obama, 2009f)</p> <p>“As we have for over 60 years, America takes these actions because our destiny is connected to those beyond our shores. But we also do it because it is right.” (Obama, 2010)</p> <p>“Fifteen years that dawned with terror touching our shores; that unfolded with a new generation fighting two long and costly wars.” (Obama, 2015a)</p>
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Table 1 Obama's American Hero

The last quote in the table especially exemplifies how similar the American Hero in Obama's speeches is to the one in Bush's discourse. This American Hero has not seen a changed narrative, as he is still grounded in the image of the frontier hero, inextricably linked

to American Exceptionalism and manifest destiny, and based on a conservative and traditional masculinity.

Besides this reiteration of the American Hero, President Obama also embodies a more compassionate element to the logic of masculinist protection. Whilst the office of President of the United States has always been connected both figuratively and discursively to the image of the father figure, Obama adds to this identity a less traditional masculine element. The father figure is crucial in the logic of masculinist protection as this narrative is based on the need for protection, represented by how a father protects his family. Before President Obama, the President of the United States have characterized this father figure by attributing traditional notions of masculinity and gender roles. As mentioned earlier, one of the key elements of the logic of masculinist protection is the subordinate role the female (representing the citizen) plays and the way she gives away some of her sovereignty and authority to her husband (Young, 2003, p. 12). Obama's provides a new iteration of the father figure, visible for example here where Obama says the U.S. should "do more to encourage fatherhood -- because what makes you a man isn't the ability to conceive a child; it's having the courage to raise one," challenging traditional gender roles in the family (Obama, 2013). However, the rewriting of this narrative is less visible in the (inter)national security discourse than in other areas (Johnson, 2013, p. 17; Landreau, 2011). Obama's role as a father figure in the 'war on terror' discourse still alludes to many traditional notions of masculinity.

Obama has chosen to very explicitly perform the role of the father of the nation. In his remarks after the attacks in Brussels in 2016 he says that:

“I am a father. And just like any other parent, the awful images from Brussels draw my thoughts to my own children’s safety. That’s also why you should be confident that defeating ISIL remains our top military, intelligence, and **national security priority.**” (Obama, 2016c)

Again, President Obama discursively reproduces a relation between the father figure, national security, and counterterrorism by mentioning them in the same sentence, reinforcing the logic of masculinist protection. Landreau also points out another rhetorical device employed in the Obama’s administration discourse which supports this myth of fatherly protection. In his speech on Afghanistan in December 2009, Obama places a lot of emphasis on the role of deliberation, consultation, and investigation with a group of expert before his decision to immensely increase the number of troops in Afghanistan. Writing in 2011, Landreau could not yet know that this would come to be an integral part of the rhetoric strategy to justify military actions against ISIL.

In many of President Obama’s remarks on the progress in the fight against ISIL, he starts his address by mentioning meeting with a group of experts before announcing the recent victories and stressing importance of the military operation.

“I just had a chance to meet with my National Security Council...” (Obama, 2015c)

“I just met with my National Security Council...” (Obama, 2016d)

“I just met with my National Security Council as part of our regular effort to review and intensify our campaign to destroy the terrorist group ISIL” (Obama, 2016e)

Table 2 Obama mentioning NSC meeting

The recurrent mentioning of the National Security Council meeting perhaps serves to fill a lapse in justification for the ‘war on terror’. Since Osama Bin Laden had been killed in 2011

and the target of the operation had shifted from Al Qaeda to ISIL, the narrative of retribution for 9/11 is not sufficient anymore to justify counterterrorist policies. The focus on the deliberate nature of the choice for military action is one of the ways in which to justify this choice. An alternative explanation is that the choice to open with these words contribute to the establishment of Obama's father figure; which is associated with notions of compassion, deliberate choice, and above all, benevolence (Landreau, 2011, p. 9). Landreau accurately describes that the tone and mood established directly at the start of these speeches echoes "that of a father reassuring his family that the big decision he has made today was made with great care, and with their communal welfare in mind" (2011, p. 9). These new associations with the father figure are also reiterated through the continual focus on international cooperation and, at times, a discursive shift away from American hegemony, to emphasise a "less authoritarian leadership style" and a more multilateral approach in the 'war on terror'. This is visible in the earlier speeches where Obama mentions that "we are successfully leaving Iraq to its people", shifting the agency away. (2009e). It is also visible in the speeches on ISIL, with a lot of focus on the NATO cooperation, such as the mentioning of the "66-member coalition" and "collective resolve" (Obama, 2016b; Obama, 2016d) Also, the rewritten father figure trope is used to promote empowerment of local communities and minorities as Obama argues his "administration is working with high-tech leaders in Silicon Valley, including Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter to help counter ISIL online and to empower more people" (2016b).

Unfortunately, the progress in rewriting the narrative of the father figure as with more inclusive and varied gender roles is offset by the continuation of the focus on the U.S. as the world leader. Obama mentions U.S. hegemony very explicitly, saying that "we will continue to show the world the best of American leadership" (Obama, 2015b). This is used rhetorically because American Exceptionalism still fuels the American version of the myth of masculinist

protection. However, if there is one positive element in the reference to U.S. hegemony by the Obama Administration in the 'war on terror' is that it is not entirely military-focused. Obama argues that U.S. "security and leadership does not come solely from the strength of our arms" and also advocating non-violence, saying "I know there's nothing weak -- nothing passive -- nothing naïve -- in the creed and lives of Gandhi and King" (Obama, 2009e; 2009f).

The Legacy of the 'Other' Men and the Denouncement of Torture

Directly after his inauguration, Obama made good on some of his key election promises and issued three executive orders, all geared towards rejecting some of Bush's controversial instruments in the 'war on terror'. These executive orders called for the closing of the prison of Guantanamo Bay, better and lawful treatment of its captives and to revoke any of Bush's orders that were outside of legality, and the founding of a taskforce to investigate the treatment of war prisoners by the United States (Landreau, 2011; Obama, 2009a; 2009b; 2009c). These executive orders are mainly aimed at rewriting the norms of how to treat 'others'. By rejecting the unlawful and inhumane instruments employed by President Bush, Obama recalibrates what is normal in regard to the treatment of the 'bad men'. These executive orders are all concerned with the politicalization of the bodies of the prisoners. To understand the relation to sexual body politics, a short history of the use of torture by the U.S. in the Middle East is necessary to include here.

Torture as part of the U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East has always been a precarious subject. The policies and protocols surrounding the use of torture in the Middle East is, according to Judith Butler, based on an outdated text from the 1970s called 'The Arab Mind' (2008, 15). This text is widely regarded as essentialist and outdated (Said, 2003). This text attributes a sort of sexual vulnerability to Muslim men. This positivist view on culture

and identity, causing a homogenous view of 'Arabs' by attributing specific characteristics to a large group of people, is now outdated, but has still influenced the U.S. perspective on torture until the 21st century. Many neoconservatives still highly value this work, as a former U.S. army colonel wrote that "[a]t the institution where I teach military officers, *The Arab Mind* forms the basis of my cultural instruction" (De Atkine, 2004). The politicalization of the body through torture occurs because the torturers enact and reiterate (sexual) dominance over the tortured. Butler argues that the torturer assumes an excessively dominant position because of the sexual freedom he enjoys, in contrast to the tortured (2008, 17). The torturers have come to believe that this allows them to exercise (sexual) violence over the tortured. Butler also argues that this stems from a deep grounded homophobia and misogyny in the U.S. army, and a reinforced emphasis on the sexual deviance of 'Arabs' and their disrespect for women's rights, influenced by works such as *The Arab Mind* (2008, 16-18).

Therefore, the fact that the first executive orders issued by President Barack Obama exemplify his vision on identity and humanity. By officially denouncing the instruments of torture used in the 'war on terror', President Obama emphasizes the humanity of the prisoners and the agency of their own bodies. Furthermore, because the torture used in the 'war on terror' also involved sexual humiliation, think for example of the Abu Ghraib scandal, the orders also reject the incrimination of the masculinities of the male prisoners. This deconstructs the binary of good men/masculinity versus evil men/masculinity and sets the stage for an alternative and more inclusive approach to masculinity in military conflict. These orders also opened up the debate of homophobia in the military and, in time, a more inclusive approach to homosexuality in the army.

Women's Rights and a New Security Rhetoric

A major criticism of Bush's 'war on terror' discourse was that the Bush administration used a masquerade of defending and fighting for women's rights to pursue democratization in the Middle East and to justify military counterterrorism actions. This same narrative has been extended by the Obama administration as is visible to references to the disrespect for women's rights by the terrorists. However, Obama's promotion of women's rights in the Middle East is more earnest and much less a cover for other objectives. This is mainly because of three reasons: (1) domestic women's rights and gender inequality are not rendered invisible, and actual gender policies are created under the Obama Administration, (2) the feminine identities constructed in the 'war on terror' discourse have much more agency in Obama's narrative than in Bush's narrative, and (3) president Obama is more vocal about the objective of nation building and democratization, and the role of the U.S. in global politics.

Gender equality has been a key topic in the Obama Administration. This is in stark contrast with the Bush Administration, which constructed women's rights as achievements of the past, and something which, in general was successfully achieved in the U.S (Ferguson, 2005, p. 20). Therefore, no significant policies or laws promoting gender equality and women's and queer rights were created under the Bush Administration (Ferguson, 2005, p. 20). Kambou, President of the International Center for Research on Women, has stated that there has been a major shift in this area under the Obama Administration (Kambou, 2016). Obama acknowledged that the existing laws were not sufficient and actively pursued the extension of civil rights and liberties. President Obama created the White House Council for Women and Girls in March 2009 by executive order, a platform for discussion and to affect actual positive change for women's rights both domestically and abroad. This has made the

issue of women's rights much more visible in the United States, and also provided a structural approach in all policy areas, as the council consists of the heads of the federal agencies (Obama, 2009d).

Another key objective of President Obama has been the deconstruction of the military as an exclusively, and traditional, masculine entity. This can be seen, for example, in the repeal of the 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' act, and the decision by Secretary of Defense Ash Carter to open up all military positions to women starting January 2016 (Pellerin, 2015). Improving women's rights is essentially about promoting gender equality and the acceptance of fluid and inclusive conceptions of gender identity. It also means that in order to achieve this, women need to enjoy the same rights as well, as well as duties. Therefore, the White House announced on December 1, 2016 that it now supports military draft for women (Korte and Vanden Brook, 2016). This mainly symbolic gesture, because there has not been a military draft since 1973, is aimed at removing the arbitrary and constructed barriers between men and women, which is the first step in allowing for the inclusion of new and alternative gender identities. A way in which this new retelling of the narrative of the military as an inclusive institution is visible in the way Carter has fulfilled his role as Secretary of Defense. By speaking often on the topic on women's and LGBT rights, there are new narratives created in which the issue of women and homophobia in the military is of increasingly less importance.² Referencing the gender stereotypes from Bush's narrative, the boundaries and the American Hero have been widened, and discursively, a family man and a female hero are alternative identities in the Obama narrative that have become available. Therefore, there is much less dissonance between policy and rhetoric in Obama's narrative than in Bush's. Obama does not display this "stealth misogyny", and it can be concluded that the Obama administration has taken steps to actively and honestly pursue gender equality both

² Examples in 2016 include: Written Message on International Women's Day, Remarks on Ending the Ban on Transgender Service in the U.S. Military, LGBT Pride Month Message, and Remarks at Sexual Assault Response Coordinators of the Year Awards (<http://www.defense.gov/secdef/speeches>).

domestically and abroad (Goldstein, qtd in Ferguson, 2005, p. 10). This is the first stage in the unveiling of the gender imagery in the 'war on terror' discourse.

Secondly, the role of women and femininities in the 'war on terror' discourse has changed significantly from Bush to Obama. Whilst in several contexts women are still necessarily passive, especially the Veiled victim has become increasingly active. In the following excerpt from Obama's Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech three identities are incorporated:

“Somewhere today, in the here and now, in the world as it is, **a soldier sees he's outgunned, but stands firm to keep the peace.** Somewhere today, in this world, a **young protestor awaits the brutality of her government, but has the courage to march on.** Somewhere today, **a mother** facing punishing poverty still takes the time to teach her child, scrapes together what few coins she has to send that child to school -- because she believes that a cruel world still has a place for that child's dreams.”

(Obama, 2009f)

The peacekeeping soldier represents the stereotypical American Hero, and the mother is his symbolic wife. However, it is the second image that is much more interesting. The young protestor is a woman, and she is constructed with a lot of agency. She is attributed the characteristic of courageous, which is in stark contrast to the stereotypical depiction of women in the 'war on terror' discourse, and establishes her as a hero. Instead of the U.S. soldier promoting women's rights as if imposing them, the soldier is passive, illustrated by the word “keep”, which is an inactive verb. The young protestor “marches”, a much more active verb. Therefore, the objective of promoting women's rights in the 'war on terror'

discourse is much more effective because it posits women in conflict areas not as vulnerable damsels in distress, but it rather empowers them and makes their agency visible.

Another visible woman in the 'war on terror' discourse is Hillary Clinton. Clinton has been occupying a far more visible position as Secretary of State under Obama than Condoleezza Rice enjoyed under Bush. Especially in the 'war on terror' discourse, where Rice was often rendered invisible, or was constructed to have a diminished form of agency. In the Obama Administration, Clinton's position was constructed as central to the Administration's efforts to combat terrorism. Obama has also emphasised Clinton's role in the Administration to show that women are just as capable as men to serve in high positions. She has also helped to construct a more inclusive approach to the promotion of women's rights abroad. Her speech at the U.S.-Afghan Women's Council 10th Anniversary Celebration Luncheon shows the earnesty of the fight for women's rights in Afghanistan. Even though the main military aspect of the campaign in Afghanistan was coming to an end, Clinton calls for "rededication" (2012). Clinton further more says that "Afghan women helped achieve a constitution that enshrines women's rights. They hold office at the national, provincial, and local levels. They serve on the High Peace Council and in provincial peace councils. They are opening and running businesses of all kinds. They are helping to build an effective and vibrant civil society" and also that "it is also the view of Afghan leaders, and it is certainly the view of the international community [that] the women of Afghanistan are a valuable and irreplaceable resource, and their rights must be protected, and their opportunities for them to contribute must be preserved" (Clinton, 2012). Here Clinton attributes a lot of agency on par of the Afghan leadership and Afghan women, showing a move towards cooperation rather than imposition of values (Clinton, 2012).

“It’s why we continue to **reject offensive stereotypes of Muslims**, the vast majority of whom share **our commitment to peace**. That’s why we defend free speech, and advocate for political prisoners, and condemn the **persecution of women**, or religious minorities, or **people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender**. We do these things not only because they are the right thing to do, but because ultimately they will make us **safer**.” (Obama, 2015a)

Obama here connects several important elements of the ‘war on terror’ narrative, in which he problematizes the relationship between the elements as they were established in by the Bush Administration. Obama starts by rejecting the idea of stereotyping Muslims, and my earlier argument does support that Obama has made significant progress in this area. It is necessary to say, however, that there is still much progress needed. He also makes an argument for the promotion women’s and LGBT rights, and that this is a crucial element in the narrative construction of national security. Furthermore, He discursively constructs a relationship between the rejection of stereotypes and commitment to peace. This is very important as Obama recognises a move away from essentialist thinking, whether about race, gender, sexual preference, can indeed offer much alternative explanations in the domain of International Relations, and the construction of narratives of normalisation and justification of violence.

Conclusion

Whilst scholars quickly jumped to the conclusion that President Obama's 'war on terror' has been largely a continuation of Bush's war both in policy and narrative, that conclusion does exclude several key changes in the role of gender in the normalisation and justification of state violence in the 'war on terror'. Whilst the narrative of the 'war on terror' still relies on the logic of masculinist protection, the stereotypical images of the American Hero and the father figure have become much more open and inclusive. In contrast to this is the continuous reliance of the invocation of the American Hero's masculinity, and masculine dominance in order to justify the military actions. Also, the Muslim Martyr stereotype has been largely abandoned for a more humane version with a lesser focus on his masculinity.

A lot of progress has been made in the demasculinization of the U.S. military. By including women and allowing for 'traditional' feminine characteristics in the military, a much more open institution is created. Also, the Obama Administration has actively pursued to decrease the insecurity and taboo around homosexuality in the military.

The pursuit of the promotion of women's rights has become more than just an appeal to the public and a cover for military action. Under the Obama Administration, much progress has been made domestically in the process towards reaching gender equality, and the promotion of LGBT rights. The promotion of women's rights abroad has, consequently, also been very high on Obama's list, as an objective, rather than an instrument. This is an important improvement in the global pursuit of gender equality.

Whilst this study has answered the question at hand, there are still many questions unanswered. Further research on this topic is necessary, and could for example look at the role of the media and popular culture in the processes of gender norm creation and justification and normalisation of military action abroad. Television series and movies such

as *Homeland* and *Zero Dark Thirty* are examples of popular culture engaging with gender and the 'war on terror'.

Lastly, the election of Donald Trump to the office of Presidency prompted much concern. Trump's utterances during his election campaign, which many might dub sexist, hint at the destruction of the process in gender equality and the possibility of alternative identities by President Obama.

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