

## How have post-9/11 Wars Been Gendered?

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### Abstract

The study evaluated the gendered representation of ‘War on Terror’ in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. In order to do that, the study looked at the participation of women in the UK and US armed forces as a case study. Women’s violence was examined as opposed to their established gendered roles with instances of female icons participating in these wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The study includes historical background of role of women in war, how to understand manhood in relation to war, the social construction of women in relation to war, feminist perspectives (colonial feminism and pacifist feminism) towards the wars, and the transformation of women from Home-Front to Front-Line after the 9/11. To understand representation of women and collect data, the reports by UK Ministry of Defense(MoD), UK Parliament records, and reports by the US Department of Defense were used. In particular, the sources published after the 9/11 have been analysed in an effort to provide better analysis of notion of women in relation to the wars. It means that the study incorporates the years between 2001 and 2014. The study figured out that the rhetoric of women’s rights was used as a justification to wage the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The sources were selected through their discussions about the place of women in relation to that of men in the wars. That is another analysis of the research that the representations and roles of women were defined to consolidate the notion of hegemonic masculinity. In a nutshell, this study has examined the relation between gender and war in an effort to understand how the wars after the 9/11 have changed gendered roles.

Keywords: *femininity, masculinity, gendered violence, September 11, Iraq, Afghanistan*

### 1. Introduction

#### 1.1 Gender and War

Gender is not only being a woman or a man biologically; it also includes factors of race, class, religion, ethnicity, and age. Social constructions for women and men represent how to properly behave in society as either male or female. As a result of this social construction, women and men's behaviours are crucial to interpreting their social relations.

Looking at wars through gendered lenses has led us to redefine the conventional gendered roles. Contrary to the traditional definition of war as exclusively the problem of men, underscoring the place and representation of women in post-9/11 wars gives studies related to gender and war new leverage to evaluate the wars properly. It is not only because women have been involved the wars as warriors and fighters, but also because women have involved the

wars from every perspective of war in different roles.

Moreover, different feminist perspectives towards the wars have characterized these new gender roles. They have looked at the relation between gender and war and tried to understand how wars have been gendered. In particular, these kinds of studies have increased as a consequence of the wars that have occurred since 9/11 (Riley, Mohanty, and Pratt, 2008).

### *1.2 The Effect of 9/11 on Women's Liberation*

As Sjoberg (2010b, p.169) points out, gender matters in understanding 9/11 and other identity conflicts on various fronts. Following the 9/11 attacks in September 2001 in Washington and New York, the Bush administration began talking about Afghani women's liberation under the Taliban regime and subsequently declared the 'War on Terror'. The War on Terror aimed at fighting the Taliban regime in order to protect the rights and dignity of women (Hunt & Rygiel, 2008, p.51).

Elshtain (Elshtain, 1987; as cited in Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007, p.4) explains the representation of women in wars by defining them as 'Beautiful Souls'. Beautiful Souls are those who are expected to be helpless against the wars, and men therefore handle protecting them because they are too naïve to fight with enemies. They have been the justification of wars because they are innocent of war itself (Elshtain, 1987, p.167; as cited in Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007, p.4).

## 2. Literature Review

### *Different Perspectives on the Post-9/11 Wars*

#### *2.1 Historical Background of the Role of Women in War*

As Bhabha points out (Chandler, Wang, and Fuller, 2010, p.67), women have always been involved in wars. They have supported their husbands and sons, suffered loneliness and loss, experienced systematic rape and other forms of sexual violence and rebuilt devastated societies. That is why it cannot be claimed that war is solely the issue of men, as women have taken part in wars in different roles.

Women have served not only as nurses and support personnel, but on the front lines, as claimed by Levin (1992,p.612). However, they have been removed from wartime jobs after wars have ended. They have been expected to return to their conventional roles at home.

### 2.1.1 *Biological Differences*

Goldstein (2001, p.2) states that 'men and women are a certain sex'. Men and women are characterized by their biological nature. Both men and women are treated according to their biological sex role as men and women. Men are men and women are women, deriving from their physical traits and their genetic makeup (Braudy, 2003, p.10).

Furthermore, as a result of women's biological differences, characteristics associated with men, such as strength, protection and leadership, are given more privilege in wartime (Sjoberg & Via, 2010a, p.3). Women have become the victims of their biological nature, because of being smaller, shorter, weaker versions of men (Britt et al., 2006, p.111).

### 2.1.2 *Cultural Differences*

Culture is a crucial element that helps to shape women's and men's identities (Detraz, 2012). According to cultural variations, women and men learn how they understand themselves and how they interact with each other. These variations also include how they and their roles are understood by civilized society and by the state (Woodward & Winter, 2007, p.3).

As Sjoberg & Via (2010a, p.44) claim, many militaristic cultures emphasize the physical and social traits of a soldier. Needless to say, this culture involves men more than women. Therefore military culture refuses the participation of women in the armed forces in an effort to maintain male domination (Woodward & Winter, 2007, p.21; Lindsey, 2000, p.564).

## 2.2 *How to Understand Manhood in Relation to War*

Each culture contributes the test of manhood as a motivation to fight (Goldstein, 2001, p.5; Prugl, 2003, p.336). The test of manhood has paved the way for men to prove their manhood as soldiers in wars because this motivation has been equated with military service and toughness under fire (Detraz, 2012, p.31).

Masculine status utilizes its hegemonic position in the armed forces by denying female characteristics, such as being emotional and weak. In doing that, men consolidate their power over women and dominate the majority of the armed forces in the UK and the US. The figures supporting this concept are note-worthy, as Woodward & Winter (2007, p.15) emphasize, in the British Army, which is widely accepted to be masculine in character, 92 percent of trained personnel are male. In the US, the situation of women is not drastically different. Women only make up around 14.5 percent of the active duty personnel in the US Army (Detraz, 2012, p.56).

This kind of notion refers to hegemonic masculinity, which is defined as the version of masculinity associated with the powerful, the successful and the dominant (Detraz, 2012, p.30).

### *2.3 Social Construction of Women In Relation to War*

Women have conspicuous responsibilities toward their family and societies. Their roles rest on nurturing, bearing and raising sons to send off to war to fight for their nation (Sjoberg & Via, 2010a, p.71). Evaluating the role of women against these established roles opposes their established biological and socially constructed qualities.

On the flip side, in modern wars, women and femininity and war have uncanny relations to each other. The new form of wars has changed the role of women, but not the spirit of the armed forces. It is claimed that they are not always the victims of wars, but that they also attend to wars as warriors, and that they are not naturally more peaceful (Chandler et al., 2010, p.140, emphasis added).

The meaning of presence in this claim does not rest on the percentage of women, but rather the role of feminine characteristics of women regarding wars. Riley (2008, p. 1193) assesses that their bodies have been seen as bodies to be moved, manipulated and sometimes to used to emphasize weakness, vulnerability, and helplessness.

### *2.4 Does Gender Matter In Understanding the Post-9/11 Wars?*

#### *2.4.1. Colonial Feminism*

Post-9/11 wars have been built on the women's rights. Liberating women served as the justification of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan (Oliver, 2007, p.39). This kind of thinking around the liberation of women has occurred in two ways. The first is through the inclusion of women in the armed forces, even though this inclusion is limited. The second is through the invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan by the US and the UK armed forces (Eisenstein, 2002; as cited in Sjoberg, 2010b, p.76).

Colonial feminism identifies women as in need of protection and in need of rescue (Sjoberg, 2010b, p.77). These feminists have deployed the language of humanitarian rescue (Lughod, 2002; as cited in Khalili, 2010, p.18). Wars have been waged under the banner of liberating women.

#### *2.4.2. Pacifist Feminism*

While colonial feminists have used the rhetoric of women's rights as a justification to

fight wars, the thesis of pacifist feminism or maternalist feminism (Conover & Sapiro, 1993, p.1082) is based on peaceful negotiations. Maternalist feminism has underscored this characteristic and claimed that the reason for being peaceful stems from social experiences. Regarding social experiences, the way women look at wars, and women perform in wars, has been shaped by these social experiences.

Women are seen as pacifists and victims and naïve about the nature of war. This kind of explanation prevents women from being violent and encourages them to support peace negotiations. Sjoberg (2010b, p.144) emphasizes that women's peacefulness make them a useful addition to negotiations.

### 3. Findings and Discussion

#### *The Participation of Women in the UK and the US Armed Forces*

In modern wars, the presence of women involved in the wars has been conspicuous in the armed forces. Detraz (2012, p.52) states that because of the participation of women in all militaries, there is a debate about what the participation of women means for the military institution. Riley (2008, p.1193) asks the same question about the meaning of the presence of women's bodies within the military and other social institutions for gender practices.

Have they sought gender equality in the armed forces as citizens of their countries as men have, or have they seen the military institution as a paying job?

#### *3.1 The Reason to Participate in the Armed Forces: Gender Equality or Paying Job?*

Technological developments, called Revolution in the Military Affairs (RMA), have paved the way for women through the operation of equipment (Carreiras, 2006, p.74). Even though women have been the victims of their biological innateness, such as being weak physically, with this advance in technology, they have been able to attend the armed forces.

On the other hand, Carreiras & Kummel (2008, p.9) argue that despite great technological developments in military institutions, combat is still associated with physical and psychological experience. Braudy (2003, p.15) confirms this explanation, stating that as the Gulf War and the war in Afghanistan have shown, war is still a combat of bodies because even smart bombs have their limits. Eventually, women have needed this ability and strength in order to meet the standards that are established on the notion of manhood.

This kind of complexity stance has lead to evaluate a 'market-oriented approach' that is

valid for military institutions as well, even though these institutions are male dominated.

The market-oriented approach (Carreiras, 2006, p.85) has disregarded women's disadvantaged positions in the armed forces, and women have thus tried to maximize their economic advantages. Women have seen the armed forces as a paying job that enables them to advance their interest. In doing so, they have received guaranteed salaries, fringe benefits, or job security (Carreiras, 2006, p.85).

### *3.2 Women's Violence as Opposed to Their Established Gendered Roles: Instances of Female Icons Participating In Wars In Iraq and Afghanistan*

Jessica Lynch is a female soldier who served in the US Army. She became the war's hero as a result of attending the US 'War on Terror' (Detraz, 2012, p.56). She became the female face of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and her involvement supported Tessler & Warriner's (1997) claim that there is no evidence that women are less militaristic than men (Caprioli 2000, p.56). Oddly enough, the figure of Jessica Lynch has been used as a representation of all US women soldiers (Riley et al., 2008), and she has been one of the most prominent instances of war-like feminists. She challenged the established gender role of women as caregivers, and her situation led to a re-examination of the ideas of masculinity and femininity. However, Detraz (2012, p.125) claims that because Jessica Lynch was from a small town in West Virginia, she only joined the military in order to see the world and make money to go to college.

Not only Jessica Lynch, but also Lyndie England, Major General Barbara Fast, Major Karpinski, and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice have all acted like men (Hunt & Rygiel, 2008, p.197). By involvement in the wars as masculinized women soldiers, it is claimed that these women have nothing to do with women's rights, women's equality, and freedom. At the end of the wars, their involvement went unnoticed, and they had to live on their own, as Jessica Lynch did with a disabled body (Hunt & Rygiel, 2008, p. 197).

The point here is that women soldiers have not been chosen randomly; rather certain women have been used as icons, and they are characterized as if they represent all women of a certain identity, position, or profession (Riley et al., 2008). Condoleezza Rice became one example of these soldiers. She represented all women of color in the US, just as Jessica Lynch represented blonde, white female soldiers.

Not only female soldiers became symbols. Laura Bush, the former First Lady of the US, and Cherie Blair, wife of then-UK Prime Minister Tony Blair, have been female icons of these

wars (Detraz, 2012, p.144). After 9/11, they made similar speeches about Afghani women's rights and supported the participation of women in the wars as if this action was a crucial step for women's liberation and equality. Bush and Blair both discussed women in Iraq and Afghanistan, stating out that 'they have an obligation to speak out' (Laura Bush, 2001; as cited in Hunt & Rygiel, 2008, p.56).

### *3.3 Exclusion of Women From the Front-Line*

Even though women's inclusion in the armed forces varies from county to county, women have been excluded from the armed forces to a much greater extent, especially since the military institution in general and the armed forces, in particular, have been characterized as masculinist organisations (Woodward & Winter, 2006, p.60)

Vojdik (2002, p.267) and Prugl (2003, p.335) emphasize the male warrior identity, admitting that women in combat zones challenge this identity, and also undermine male bonding and the cohesion of troops.

On the website of the UK Parliament, it is stated that the current policy of the exclusion of women would remain the same, and that admitting women would involve a risk under the conditions of a high-intensity, close-quarter battle in terms of combat effectiveness (UK Parliament, 2002, UK Parliament, 2010). This publication concludes by suggesting that for those who wish to serve their country, there are a maximum numbers of trades available (UK Parliament, 2010).

In the US army, the presence of women is not noticeably different from that of the UK army. Women make up around 14.5 percent of the active duty personnel (Detraz, 2012, p.56), and they are still prohibited from direct combat roles. As determined by the US Department of Defence, even though women have been deployed in the military, their presence is limited.

### Case Study: Gendered Representation of 'War on Terror'

After the attacks in September 2001 in Washington and New York, with the support of the UK, the US initiated a military response in Afghanistan and Iraq (Woodward & Winter, 2007, p.34). These attacks have been regarded as a threat to the US national identity. As a 'liberal' and 'democratic' nation, the administration of President George W. Bush decided to wage war against the Taliban and Al Qaeda. In an effort to rally public opinion, the Bush administration used gendered stereotypes of women.

#### *4.1 Women's Liberation as Justification of Wars*

Every person in the population had a role to play. As a result of their traditional gendered roles, women experienced being characterized as maid-in-waiting and helpless victims of the wars (Dombrowski, 2005, p.1). In wartime, they are placed in the category of weakness, vulnerability, and helplessness, even if they are involved in the wars as soldiers. Still, in the 'War on Terror', the Bush administration declared that the reason to wage war was to protect the women's rights. With the construction of femaleness and femininity, humanitarian rescue narratives served the Bush administration to anchor the justification of wars (Khalili, 2010, p.18).

Sjoberg (2010b, p.74) clarifies that these rescue narratives have been used as a protection racket. That is to say, in an effort to rally public support, women have been seen as victims that need to be rescued and protected (Sjoberg 2010b; Hunt & Rygiel, 2008; Carreiras & Kummel, 2008; Detraz, 2012).

#### *4.2 Reinforcement of Masculine Images: Hegemonic Masculinity*

Men were those who wielded violence, and as a result of social expectations, war is believed to be male behaviour (Inayatullah & Riley, 2006). In so acting, the military institution has become a place where men have been able to maintain their masculine characters. In order to be able to preserve their places, men have tended to exclude women from this institution. This endeavour has been called 'preserving patriarchy'. Patriarchy has required male superiority in wartime and tried to maximize its power over women and their femininity.

This situation has created a hegemonic masculinity, which has been one of the prominent types of masculinities. Hegemonic masculinity has been associated with power and men. Kronsell (2005, p.281) and Tickner (1992, p.6; as cited in Sjoberg & Via, 2010, p.43) clarify that this masculinity refers to certain masculine norms and values that have become dominant in specific institutions of social control.

Even the images of women attending the War on Terror as soldiers have been used to maximize US male soldiers' domination. Jessica Lynch became one of the examples of this situation. Even though her participation was appreciated on the eve of War on Terror as a female Rambo (Detraz, 2012, p.57), her capture was used to encourage male soldiers to action, as claimed by Bragg (2003, p.124; as cited in Riley et al., 2008, p.36). Eventually, despite her

participation, she was defined as a woman who is required protecting by courageous soldiers from mistreatment at the hands of Iraqis (Inayatullah & Riley, 2006, p.199; Detraz, 2012, p.57).

## 5. Conclusion

This study has examined the relation between gender and war in an effort to understand how the wars after 9/11 have changed gendered roles. The difference between sex and gender showed that both men and women have been identified with their sex and their characteristics. Established gender roles about how to be a man and a woman enabled a prediction about women and men's identities.

The main point here is the rhetoric of liberation. There were different kinds of perspectives in understanding the notion of liberation. From the feminists' point of view, it meant equality with men, being against the wars, or protecting women from the wars. However, liberation as defined by the Bush administration stated that women's liberation and freedom could be achieved through men and male-dominated military institution. So, the representations and roles of women were defined to consolidate the notion of hegemonic masculinity that men have always held.

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