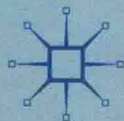


Foreign Security Policy, Gender, and US Military Identity



GENDER AND POLITICS

Elgin Medea Brunner



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*Senior Researcher, Center for Security Studies, Swiss Federal Institute of Technology,
ETH Zurich, Switzerland*



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Introduction

On April 2, 2003, a success story from the military conflict in Iraq made the international headlines. For the first time since the Second World War, an American prisoner of war (POW) had been successfully rescued from enemy hands. Private First Class Jessica Lynch, 'a young, blond, pretty' American soldier deployed with the 507th Maintenance Company in Iraq and who had been held as a POW at Saddam Hussein hospital in Nasiriyah since March 23, was rescued by Task Force 20, a covert US special operations unit responsible only for the highest American priorities in Iraq such as 'hunting for weapons of mass destruction, weapons scientists and Baath party leaders' (Priest 2003) and whose primary goal was to capture or kill so-called high-value targets. Not only did the unit carry a night-vision video camera and record the rescue at the request of the military public affairs office, but it also apparently staged a firefight inside the hospital. The building had actually been abandoned by the Iraqi military personnel, and even 'her Iraqi guards had long fled' (Kampfner 2003). Nevertheless, US President George Bush two days later publicly thanked those 'Marines and Special Operations forces [who] set out on a daring rescue mission' (Bush 2003). The edited version of the videotape was immediately released and accompanied by a Pentagon statement claiming that Lynch suffered from stab and bullet wounds, that she had been slapped and interrogated. At a crucial moment in the early stages of the war in Iraq, when media reports were growing increasingly sceptical and experts publicly started to question the military strategy of the allied forces,¹ this story – now famously labelled 'Saving Private Jessica' and imbued with all the necessary elements to become an heroic epic – appeared to be highly successful in reinvigorating patriotic fervour over the issues perceived to be at stake in Iraq. More and more details were spread by the media. It was soon

'known' that the recuperating Lynch's first request was 'pink casts for her fractured legs and arm [and] a new hairbrush', that she had won the 'Miss Congeniality [contest] in the beauty pageant at her county fair' in her pre-army life and that, upon her rescue, 'she was silent, a sheet pulled tightly over her head' and only responded, when the soldiers called '[w]e're here to protect you and take you home', by squeezing the hand of an Army Ranger and asking '[d]on't let anyone leave me' (Morse 2003).

However, as was first revealed in a *Guardian* article and a BBC documentary² in mid-May, 'there was [no sign] of shooting, no bullet inside her body, not stab wound – only RTA, road traffic accident'. Moreover, Anmar Uday, a doctor at the Nasiriyah hospital, who witnessed Lynch's rescue recounted:

We heard the noise of helicopters. We were surprised. Why do this? There was no military, there were no soldiers in the hospital. It was like a Hollywood film. They cried, 'Go, go, go', with guns and blanks and the sound of explosions. They made a show – an action movie like Sylvester Stallone or Jackie Chan, with jumping and shouting, breaking down doors. All the time the camera rolling.

(Kampfner 2003)

Hence, while the distortions of the official narrative finally emerged and not only forced the media to correct their account, but also compelled the army to conduct an analysis of the circumstances under which the 507th Maintenance Company had been ambushed (US Army 2003), the now famous 'Saving Private Jessica' story is representative of two interlinked phenomena.

The first is the readiness of both the military personnel and the government executives to rely on what some call perception management or public affairs operations and others outright instances of propaganda or psychological operations. Clearly, the videotaped rescue of Private Jessica Lynch and the representation of it delivered by US Central Command's public affairs office in Qatar can be qualified as an 'action [...] to convey/or deny selected information [...] to audiences to influence their emotions, motives, and objective reasoning [...] resulting in [...] behaviors favorable to the originator's objectives' (USAF JP3-53 2003). It thus matches the definition of so-called military perception management and does '[i]n various ways combine [...] truth projection, operations security, cover and deception, and psychological operations' (ibid.). These stories are war stories, and perception management strives

to instrumentalise accounts of war in order to influence audiences and their behaviour.

Second, the above story is an example of how flagrant gender stereotypes underpin military perception management operations. This particular and manufactured rescue narrative is, both in the official version and in the media projections of it, structured along the age-old and deeply sedimented story of the 'damsel in distress' and her virile saviour. Not only would a male POW fearfully covering under a sheet at the very moment of his rescue have been precluded from becoming a hero, unlike 'the picture of the doe-eyed Lynch swaddled in an American flag while being whisked to safety on a military stretcher [that] had already become an icon' (Morse 2003) within a few hours of the news, this very image also epitomises the conjunction and simultaneous production of gender and state identity through war. It is the powerful American state (flag) that mobilises all its manly competence (its special operations team) to come to the rescue of the brave and innocent, but ultimately helpless woman ('doe-eyed' Lynch).³ Thus, these war stories rely on and thereby simultaneously produce profoundly stereotyped identities.

On the more general level, since time immemorial, war stories have relied on othering (cf. Peterson 2010), which presupposes the tracing of and differentiation from the Self. Thus, war stories are fundamentally about the production of identity. In other words, state identity is written through foreign policies. This process, however, also works reciprocally. Not only do foreign policies write identity, but identity also writes foreign policy (Hansen 2006). Hence, it is both through war stories and through identification that the political work of inclusion and exclusion is performed, since 'the constitution of identity is achieved through the inscription of boundaries which serve to demarcate an "inside" from an "outside", a "self" from an "other", a "domestic" from a "foreign"' (Campbell 1992: 8). Furthermore, this political work relies heavily on gendered ideologies (e.g., Hunt and Rygiel 2006), which tend to go unnoticed. As the Jessica Lynch story exemplifies, both the narratives of war and the mechanisms of identification fundamentally operate on gendered and gendering assumptions such as the protection principle and the stereotypical identifications that come with it (Young 2003). Not only the interlocking character of war narratives and identifications, but also their inherently gendered foundations are epitomised in the anthropomorphic assumption of the state that can be understood as being generative of the discipline of International Relations, which is accordingly understood by many to 'picture [...] the

hierarchical relations that exist among states and between states and domestic populations' (Wadley 2010: 40).

This points to the core of an issue that is all too seldom even noticed, not to mention subjected to due scrutiny, namely the gendered ideologies that corroborate the link between state identity and foreign security policy. This is precisely what this book is interested in. It unravels the way in which gender structures the production of state identity through the military doctrine and practice of perception management and to what effect. More specifically, it does so by looking at a particular case, a particular state, and a particular foreign security policy. It reads (the gendered traces of) the identity of the United States (from its military documents of perception management in conflict) during the period from 1991 to 2003/2007. It reads the 'othering' and the 'selfing' that occurs in these particular war stories in order not only to lay bare the gendered ideologies that underpin these identity investments, but also to disclose their contingency and to open up spaces for alternatives. Thus, this book tackles the particular war narrative of US military doctrine and its implementation of so-called perception management in order to unravel some of its political implications, namely the gendered identifications and the respective power arrangements that come with these. Furthermore, both the documents and the identifications that they engender are instances not only of security, but also of statecraft. The centrepiece of this book is an examination of how, and with which contents, the particular military doctrine and practice of perception management reifies the identity of the state, and of the implications that this reification entails.

Perception management as discourse

Semantics – the aspects of meanings that are expressed in language – are of crucial importance for perception management, since informational manipulation relies on the selective but purposeful projection of meaning. There are, of course, different ways of depicting the importance of written and/or spoken language in social science research, but a common feature is the focus on a defining moment of interrelatedness between power and discourse. This interrelatedness manifests itself in different ways, such as in the societal establishment and maintenance (disciplining) of knowledgeable practices (norms) or in the development of commonly accepted historical narratives. 'From ancient Greek philosophy through the present time, logocentrism has been the dominant operation for constructing meaning in Western thought' (Gregory

1989: xvi). Logocentrism refers to the belief that the assumed underlying basis of reality can be revealed by pure reason and truth. The term is derived from the Greek word *logos* meaning word, reason, and spirit, and 'logocentrism' therefore implies a conflation and monopolising of truth and its production. Hence, the production of meaning constitutes one nexus linking power and discursive agency, the forging of a certain intelligibility to become accepted. The phenomenon of 'discourses as being productive (or reproductive) of things defined by the discourse' (Milliken 1999: 229) subsumes an entire and complex process in which knowledgeable practices are defined and disciplining techniques and practices are elaborated and applied. Most importantly, through the quality of discourses 'to work to define and to enable, and also to silence and to exclude [...] by [...] endorsing a certain common sense, but making other modes of categorizing and judging meaningless, impracticable, inadequate or otherwise disqualified' (Milliken 2001: 139), the relevance of an examination and analysis of these mechanisms becomes evident. This process has the potential to denaturalise dominant practices of identification by exposing them.

Further, it has been clearly established that 'texts as elements of social events have causal effects – i.e. they bring about changes' (Fairclough 2003: 8). It is the discursive framing mechanism that mediates the process. Within the process, frames are to be understood as central basic perception categories and structures through which the actors perceive their environment and the world (Dunn and Mauer 2006). These categories are pre-existent in the culture and in the collective memory of the actors. Therefore, the actors attribute meaning to the things they perceive through their recognition as things corresponding to the previously structured world (Donati 2001). Hence, discursive framing is the rhetorical (written and spoken) allusion to such pre-existing cognitive models and thereby shapes and perpetuates them. When this is done successfully, discursive framing imprints the existing social reality correspondingly. To put it differently, through this framing mechanism, discourse becomes (among other things) productive of reality. Milliken (1999) distinguishes three main theoretical commitments of discourse analysis, including 'discourses as systems of signification', 'discourse productivity', and the 'play of practice'. While all of these commitments evidence that power is an effect of, and is instantiated in, discourse (language), their complex operation mechanisms differ. On the one hand, it is the 'discourses as systems of signification' that shall be central to the analysis of the perception management doctrine and practice as provided in this book, with a focus on a particular set of systems of

significations, namely the construction of gendered identities. On the other hand, the process and procedures of 'discourse productivity' shall then become the major analytical tool for the analysis of the implications of the gendered identifications on the state, on policy, and on society.

While insisting on the social effects of texts (discourse productivity), Fairclough (2003) also underlines the ideological effects of spoken and written words, seeing ideology as a modality of power. It is also a particular aim of the analysis provided in this book to elicit the ideological dimensions of how identities are discursively constructed relying upon gendered underpinnings. The conflation of power and discourse is pervasive, and it articulates itself in ideology. Power, like gender, is relational. Drawing on Derrida's philosophical work, we understand discourses as being 'structured largely in terms of binary oppositions [...] that [...] establish a relation of power' (Milliken 1999: 229). These binaries are hierarchically gendered, and thereby they univocally empower and disempower. That analysis is a convincing as well as a suitable model that can aid our understanding of the gendered framing of the US military's perception management doctrine and practice and its implications. Thus, the analysis that is performed in this book builds on Derrida's insights as to how 'discourses make intelligible some ways of [...] operationalizing a particular "regime of truth"' (Milliken 1999: 229), and it contributes in directing 'us towards studying dominating or hegemonic discourses' (ibid.: 230). It is the particular hegemonic discourse deployed by the US military in its doctrinal documents on perception management operations and the very products this doctrine generates that come under close scrutiny in this book.

From 1991 to 2003/2007

The second Gulf War was regarded by many observers as the first information war (Campen 1992). This label is predicated on the focus on the novel technological aspects of so-called military information operations having appeared for the first time in an armed conflict. Five Dutch hackers gained prominence for their intrusion into the computer systems of 34 American military sites, including those directly supporting Operation Desert Storm, and for later allegedly offering the information gained to Saddam Hussein who, fearing a trap, apparently declined the offer (Denning 1999). The manoeuvres to shape perceptions – to influence emotions, control behaviour, and forge outcomes – on both sides remained the more traditional ones of media control and censorship,

such as the US military's exclusive admittance of only 126 journalists accredited by the Pentagon, assembled in the media pools, and dependent on both military escort and facilities to investigate and transmit their stories (Gloaled.org a). Nevertheless, one particular story first gained notoriety for supposedly illustrating the cruelty of Saddam Hussein's troops, and then drew attention to the active attempts to shape perceptions: In the so-called incubator baby incident, the Iraqi invaders of Kuwait were accused of having removed babies in the premature unit of a hospital from their incubators. A female, whose name was only given as 'Nayirah', tearfully testified about this story in a US Congress hearing. She was later unmasked as the daughter of Saud al Sabah, Kuwait's ambassador to the United States. Moreover, it was also disclosed that Hill and Knowlton, a large public relations firm, had helped prepare her testimony, and that the young woman had rehearsed before video cameras in the firm's Washington headquarters (Gloaled.org b). This is another example of how perception management operations are used in war. However, as of 1991, the only doctrine document published on so-called psychological operations dated from 1979 (Department of the Army 1979). In contrast, during the decade of the 1990s – starting immediately after Operation Desert Storm – multiple doctrine documents were compiled and published under the header of so-called information operations.

Therefore, the time period under examination in this book ranges from 1991 to 2003 and covers the major conflicts with US involvement, namely the Persian Gulf War of 1991 (labelled the 'first information war'); the Somalia intervention of 1993, which gave birth to the so-called CNN effect; the Kosovo war of 1999 (dubbed by some as the first 'virtual war'); the Afghanistan campaign as a component of the 'war on terror'; and, finally, the invasion and occupation of Iraq, which began in 2003. The assumption is that the development of the military doctrine on the state's intentions to shape perceptions in conflict is representatively traceable within this period extended to 2007 by comparing and contrasting it with the specific products issued by the US armed forces in each of these military encounters. This analysis exposes the dynamics that the so-called information revolution increasingly unfolds upon the state's actual (in)capacity to uphold its monopoly on 'information' during conflict. Moreover, the focus lies exclusively on the United States. As a consequence of the United States' overwhelming, and widely acknowledged, power lead – however it may be defined – vis-à-vis the rest of the world, its military doctrine is not only, and naturally so, at the cutting edge, but also best reflects the

conceptual development of interest here. Also, the US military doctrine documents are the only ones accessible to a relatively comprehensive degree, whereas all other official utterances, as well as strategic and planning papers, are entirely accessible.

A gendered identity performance of statehood

Empirically, on the one hand, the phenomenon of the increasingly important perception management operations as a presumably powerful policy instrument within the environment of the so-called and propagated 'information age' is underscrutinised. On the other hand, the theoretically inspired and highly consequential observation that gender is an equally powerful analytical category intrinsic to the competition over power and simultaneously productive of identity and policy lacks widespread acceptance and is, therefore, in dire need of further and sound backing. This book provides both.

The constitutive consequentiality, or performativity (Butler 1997), of discursive framing, called discourse productivity, points to the unambiguous importance of performing a discourse analysis of US military information operations. Furthermore, this constitutive consequentiality also provides us with a focus within these information operations. Obviously, the latter will lie on semantic perception management and not on the technologically determined aspects, such as data mining or computer network attacks, for example. Most importantly, the understanding of discourse as having a productive/constitutive power enables us to speculate on the implications that the US perception management operations have for the state itself, on its policy, and on society at large. Linking this up with the decisive focus on the gendered identity constructions within these very operations, this analysis enables us to unravel the link between military security policy and practice and the (re-)production of state identity.

To this end, two specific bodies of documents are subjected to a thorough discourse analysis: The first includes the military doctrine documents (on so-called Information Warfare, Information Operations, and Psychological Operations) issued by the US armed forces in the period between 1991 and 2007, which focus on how the US armed forces intend to shape perceptions in conflict (including an overall of 26 documents). The second body of documents includes an overall of 285 leaflets issued by the US armed forces and dropped over the various conflict zones within the time period between 1991 and 2003 in order to shape perceptions of target audiences effectively. The reading of identity derived from

the particular military documents and presented in this book is based on the understanding of identity as lacking a foundational essence, but depending upon its enactment. In order to bring out the enacted substances of identity, a process of multiple reading is applied to the documents as the tool for textual deconstruction of dominant meanings and practices. This analytical process of multiple reading is analytically guided by the concept of intertextuality.

In sum, both a state's intentional attempts to shape perceptions of whatever audience and the often unconscious constructions of gender in war, peace, and security depend on discursive frameworks in order to have an effect. Consequently, discourse analysis is the most suitable tool for unravelling the respective mechanisms that are at work here. Discourse analysis as an epistemological framework is situated within the theoretical strand of post-structuralism. At the core of post-structuralist International Relations is the reciprocally performative (as opposed to causal) relation between foreign policy and identity. Discourse analysis therefore attempts to read the identity of foreign policy texts and vice versa (Hansen 2006). Our focus of interest lies on US military perception management in conflict between 1991 and 2003/2007: a particular strand of US foreign policy. Furthermore, the aim is to look at the performative relation between perception management operations and particular articulations of identity: the constructions of and through gender.

Hence, this book provides a discourse analysis of US military perception management doctrine and practice in the period between 1991 and 2003/2007. It asks how this particular discourse draws on gendered constructions of identity and what implications these constructions have for the state, on its policy, and on its society.

The analysis provided in this book is a valuable contribution for several reasons. First, neither perception management doctrine nor its implementation in practice – the products, as they are called – is exempted from the pervasiveness of gendered constructions that percolate the entire range of societal representations, discourses, and practices. These constructions constitute a highly relevant focal point of research on the interaction between operational military doctrine and sociopolitical and societal developments. Nevertheless, the particular aspect of gendered constructions within perception management doctrine and practice has not yet come under systematic scrutiny. The presumed functionality of perception management on the one hand and the theoretical suggestions of discourse productivity on the other make it not only truly interesting, but also highly relevant to ask