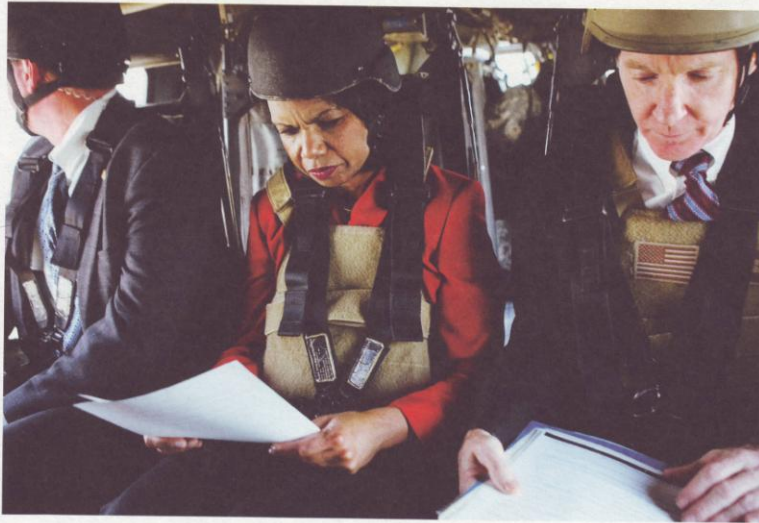


## **What do women foreign policy leaders mean for gender and for international relations? The Case of Condoleezza Rice**

Presentation by Nicola Pratt, University of Warwick, to the conference, Women and US Foreign Policy, London, 21 May 2010.

I should preface this presentation by saying that I am neither a US foreign policy specialist nor have I ever studied particular women figures in politics. I became interested in Condoleezza Rice because I study the Middle East. She oversaw some policies with terrible repercussions for women and men: including the ostracizing of Yasser Arafat, the political boycott of Hamas following their election to power and failing to press for a ceasefire between Israel and Hizbollah in the war of 2006. Simultaneously I became aware that for many within the US, Rice was akin to a cultural icon and her gender and race were held up as a demonstration of just how far US foreign policy had come (in terms of being 'progressive').



Born in the crucible of the Civil Rights movement – Birmingham, Alabama – in 1954, Condoleezza Rice was the first ever female African-American Secretary of State (2005–2009), and the second ever female to hold the post. The first was Madeleine Albright, and it was thanks to a high-school lecture given by her father that Condoleezza's interest in politics was aroused: igniting an obsession which would propel her toward a sky-scraping academic career and a political career unlike any other. Dr Rice became National Security Advisor from 2001 to 2005 – her policies after 9/11 and during the Iraq invasion, making her one of the most powerful players in the hottest debate of our era.

**BARBARA BUSH:** What has life outside of the government been like?

**DR CONDOLEEZZA RICE:** Life... has been great. I can read the newspaper and not think that I have to do anything about what's in it. It has been really fun to return to Stanford, which has been my home really since 1981. I taught my first undergraduate seminar just this week, and I'm writing two books, one about my family and one about the last eight years in terms of foreign policy. Life is very full and I'm really enjoying it.

**BB:** What do you think of the current administration? Is it hard to remove yourself from the issues since you were so recently involved in the same ones?

**CR:** I'm a strong believer in change being a good thing. We had our chance for eight years and now they have theirs. I've said, and President Bush has said, I owe them my silence and I add that I owe them my loyalty. If I have comments to make to them, I know the people there very well. They're all very good people, patriotic people, smart people. It's really hard when you try to do a job and you have "formers" out there trying to tell you what to do... I've never been a "former" anything in my own mind.

**BB:** Are there specific issues you are interested in continuing to work on?

**CR:** I'm continuing to work on girls' education and empowerment and women's empowerment because I think that is really important. It's the key to development, it's the key to prosperity; it's the key to building decent societies... I expect to continue to work on education more broadly. I've always thought that if we can't provide a good education for American kids or kids abroad then they really have no future.

**BB:** Do you think you'll see a female President in the United States in your lifetime?

**CR:** Oh, absolutely. I think what people sometimes don't realize is we don't just elect our Presidents from any job category. The most dominant place from where we elect our Presidents are governors and senators. And now that more women are moving into the position of governor and senator, you're going to start seeing more women in the pool of people who are considered to have the appropriate background to be President.

**BB:** What was it like to be a female in such an important position and deal with Muslim leaders? Did you ever experience any prejudice?

**CR:** I didn't really feel any prejudice for being a woman. I mean, obviously, they have their traditions and those are imbedded with some prejudices. But, it's funny. Generally, you tend to transcend gender as Secretary of State. But, actually, sometimes it was an advantage. I can remember speaking to very, very conservative Shia clerics, for instance, who can't shake your hand because you were a woman. But at the end of meeting they would say something like, "Can you meet my 13-year-old granddaughter?" Then this little girl would come out and say, "Oh, I wanna do what you do", and the grandfather would just smile and beam, and I would think, "Well, this is good. He sees a different possibility for his granddaughter". So, I think I was able

In this presentation I acknowledge that there are increasing numbers of women in foreign policy positions, especially in the United States. This is not only historically anomalous given the traditional view of foreign policy and international security as a male preserve but also in light of the increasing

militarization of the post-9/11 period. Taking Condoleezza Rice as a case study, I discount the notion that women foreign policy leaders bring something different (or essentially feminine) to foreign policy making. Nevertheless, the increasing visibility of women in foreign policy making plays a role in constructing gendered and racialised identities and enabling new subjects to come into being to support the US-led so-called War on Terror and the reproduction of global hierarchies of power within which the US is hegemonic.

## Introduction

Traditionally, feminists have asked, 'where are the women?' in the realm of international politics and have found that women have been very much marginalised in this area. Prime ministers and presidents, for the overwhelming part, have been men. Masculinist values have been associated with good national leaders: being tough, decisive, steadfast and bold.

Margaret Thatcher was seen as a world leader not because she was a woman but because she acted like a man. The ultimate responsibility of a national leader is to 'defend the homeland' against external threats and, if necessary, to lead the country in war.

Just as the ultimate role of national leader is to sanction violence against an 'enemy', so the ultimate role of a citizen is to take up arms to defend, what Cynthia Enloe calls, 'thewomenandchildren'. In their 1993 book, McGlen and Reid Sarkees found that 'the legacy of the [male] soldier-citizen' still permeated the State and Defense departments and underpinned discriminatory attitudes towards women in foreign policy positions (McGlen and Sarkees 1993).

## A 'new agenda' in international security

Since the end of the Cold War, some have argued that a new agenda has appeared in international relations. This agenda recognises the importance of non-military dimensions of security. Many regard the passage of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 in the year 2000 as a landmark in the development of this agenda. The resolution calls for: women to be officially included in conflict management, peace-building and post-conflict reconstruction through their appointment to decision-making bodies at all levels; supporting women's groups involved in peace-building and conflict resolutions; recognising the special needs and rights of women and girls in conflict situations.

For many feminists, resolution 1325 finally enshrines in international law a recognition of the gendered nature of armed conflict and the important role that women play in peace-building. Moreover, it demonstrates that international peace and security is a gendered issue.

Meanwhile, the US has also declared the significance of women's empowerment for foreign policy. This began under the Clinton administration, came to prominence under the Bush administration and is also an important aspect of the Obama administration, under Hillary Clinton's leadership of the State Department. In the run-up to the wars against Afghanistan and Iraq,

members of the Bush administration declared their support for women's rights in these countries. The Middle East Partnership Initiative, announced in 2003, includes a 'woman's empowerment pillar' (in addition to political reform, economic opportunity and education).

The appearance of women within international security concerns amongst world leaders is maybe not such a new development. In the not-so-distant past, colonial powers sought to rescue colonized women from barbaric and traditional practices, such as widow-burning and veiling. This was part of the civilising mission that justified the colonial project. The post-colonial critic, Gayatri Spivak has called this a process of 'White men saving brown women from brown men'.

The new security agenda allows the US and its allies to construct themselves as protectors and defenders of Other women, thereby reaffirming the masculine identity of Western nations in the post-9/11 era. Simultaneously, the plight of Other women has enabled the US and its allies to justify its use of violence against other nations in the so-called War on Terror. Nowhere is this more apparent than in US promotion of women's situation in Afghanistan and Iraq in the lead up to the wars on these countries.

What is surprising is that there is increased visibility in the number of women in foreign policy leadership roles simultaneously that international politics has become more militarised in the wake of 9/11 and the so-called War on Terror. How can we explain this and what does it mean?

Previous research argues that those women who manage to break through cultural stereotypes and institutionalised sexism to join the foreign policy establishment are the exceptions and, more importantly, do not demonstrate any differences from men in the formulation and implementation of foreign policy (McGlen and Sarkees 1993). Moreover, as Cynthia Enloe notes, 'when a woman is let in by the men who control the political elite it usually is precisely because that woman has learned the lessons of masculinised political behaviour well enough not to threaten male political privilege.' (Enloe 2001): 6-7). The inclusion of female foreign policy leaders in what is historically a male-dominated and masculinist domain begs the question how is this inclusion enabled. Zillah Eisenstein warns, 'the exclusion of women from certain spaces and dreams is not parallel to their inclusion in them. Inclusion and exclusion are not simple opposites. Inclusion allows a partial renegotiation of the gendering and racing of power, but not a power shift. Exclusion exposes the need for a power shift' (Eisenstein 2007: 94). How is power reconfigured when women are allowed into traditional male domains? I examine here the representation of Condoleezza Rice in popular culture and the media to understand this.

What is noticeable when comparing Condoleezza Rice to previous high profile foreign policy leaders, is that there seems to be something **different** in the

(self-) representation<sup>1</sup> of Rice from her predecessors. Whereas, women such as Margaret Thatcher, Jeanne Kirkpatrick, Golda Meir and (perhaps) Madeleine Albright were represented and sought to represent themselves as in tune with their masculine selves, more recent women leaders appear more confident to demonstrate aspects of their femininity alongside the 'masculine traits' that make them effective in foreign affairs. Condoleezza Rice is portrayed as combining attributes of toughness and intelligence with 'charm' and 'style'.

### *Ain't I a Woman?*

The title here refers to several things. It is the name of a book by the African-American feminist writer bell hooks. The book, published in 1981, examines the interplay of sexism and racism in black women's lives. The title of the book refers to the 'historical devaluation of black womanhood', the labelling of black slave women as 'masculinized sub-human creatures' (hooks 1981): 71) as well as the denial of a need for feminism amongst black people and the exclusion of black women's experiences from mainstream feminism. Hooks argues that by representing black women as not really women against the measure of white femininity, it places black women beyond the concerns of feminism whilst denying their entitlement to rights.

Contrary to historical representations of black women, Rice is often represented as feminine. Moreover, she is not afraid to perform her femininity—her love of shoes, her piano playing, her respect for patriarchy

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<sup>1</sup> I focus here on the ways that Rice appears to manage her image in the media rather than the negative media representations of her person. That is not to disregard the existence or significance of these representations.

(whether George Bush as the head of the US polity or her father as head of the family). When Oprah Winfrey asks Dr Rice, 'Do you have girly-girl moments with your friends?', Condoleezza Rice answers, 'Oh, sure'.

As Baumgardner and Richards, authors of *Manifesta*, argue, 'Girlie culture is a rebellion against the false impression that since women don't want to be sexually exploited, they don't want to be sexual; against the necessity of brass-buttoned, red-suited seriousness to infiltrate a man's world ...' (Baumgardner and Richards 2004): 62). Baumgardner and Richards also highlight that 'girlie' feminism is also about enjoying what consumerism has to offer rather than rejecting this as necessarily disempowering to women. In other words, women can combine 'girliness' and 'power' to be successful in a man's world.

I would term this so-called feminist embrace of consumerism as a 'neo-liberal feminism', which encourages women to engage with the market as a route to empowerment. This neo-liberal feminism can be seen in the pro-woman rhetoric of Condoleezza Rice and other members of the Bush administration. In Iraq and Afghanistan, US funds have been allocated to training women in entrepreneurship and other skills to enable them to enter market relations. Interestingly, the US has funded women to do 'traditional' feminine activities, such as baking bread and sewing, but to develop these as money-making activities and as part of a so-called 'empowerment' agenda.

The philosophy of neo-liberal feminism is also one of unencumbered agency: that is, that nothing holds you back except for your own lack of ambition. Condoleezza Rice in an interview with Barbara Bush emphasizes how she



inherited such values from her parents: 'The most important lesson was, you might not be able to control your circumstances, but you could control how you reacted to your circumstances. So, in segregated Birmingham, my parents had me convinced that even though we couldn't have a hamburger at a restaurant, because Birmingham was segregated, I could still be President of the United States if I wanted to be ... so I learned to always have higher expectations of myself than people have of you' (Bush 2010). The structures of racism, patriarchy and imperialism are deemed to be irrelevant to individual success.

This is a process that Angela McRobbie describes as 'endowing the new female subject with capacity ... Within specified social conditions and political constraints, young, increasingly well-educated women, of different ethnic and social backgrounds, now find themselves charged with the requirement that they perform as economically active female citizens' (McRobbie 2009): 58). Yet, this new feminine subjectivity is a 'post-feminist masquerade'<sup>2</sup> which 're-orchestrates the heterosexual matrix in order to secure, once again, the existence of patriarchal law and masculine hegemony, but this time by means of a kind of ironic, quasi-feminist staking out of a distance in the act of taking on the garb of femininity' (McRobbie 2009): 64). I think that, when examining Condoleezza Rice's life and her moments of self-representation in interviews, it is possible to argue that Rice has employed a strategy of 'post-feminist masquerade' in moving forward her career. In the words of Elisabeth Bulmiller, author of a biography of Condoleezza Rice, one reason Bush was

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<sup>2</sup> This is derived from Joan Riviere's work, 'Womanliness as masquerade' in V. Burgin, J. Donald and C. Kaplan (eds) *Formations of Fantasy*, London: Methuen, 1929/1986: 35-44.

so taken with Rice was 'she never made him feel inadequate or ignorant' (cit. in (Goldberg 2009).

Condoleezza Rice not only embodies this subjectivity (which I would term as recently hegemonic rather than new) but she is also contributing to reproducing it globally with particular consequences for women in the Global South. In her interview with Barbara Bush, Rice says: 'I can remember speaking to very, very conservative Shia clerics [in Iraq], for instance, who can't shake your hand because you were a woman. But at the end of the meeting they would say something like, "Can you meet my 13-year-old granddaughter?" Then this little girl would come out and say, "Oh, I wanna do what you do", and the grandfather would just smile and beam, and I would think, "Well, this is good. He sees a different possibility for his granddaughter". So, I think I was able to be something more of a role model for women in the Middle East and that was important' (Bush 2010).

Here, Rice validates her own femininity (a 'girlie' femininity) against an Other, 'Middle Eastern femininity'. Rice's femininity not only embodies the capacity of the new feminine subject within the neo-liberal global economy but also the 'proof' of the 'progressiveness' of the West/US against the 'backwardness' of the Middle East. In so doing, Rice's words represent a neo-colonial feminism that seeks to improve the condition of women abroad and 'liberate' them from the oppressive traditions of Islam. She represents a universal norm; the standard to which Middle Eastern women should aspire. Discussing the colonial encounter, Meyda Yegenoglu argues that 'Western women's recognition of herself as a subject was possible only outside national

boundaries, in the encounter of a *sexually same yet culturally different other* (author's emphasis) (Yeegenoglu 1998): 107).

In a context of US hegemony over the Middle East and the foreign policy actions of the US within the so-called War on Terror – many of which Rice is directly implicated – Rice's support of Other women's empowerment is part of demarcating Western 'civilisation' from the threatening, non-Western Other as well as legitimising her own position as a black woman within the US foreign policy establishment.

In the discourse of Other women's empowerment, Other women are transformed from victims to actors through the power of US imperialism, which of course is very seductive for women whose voices have been silenced and whose struggles marginalised for decades. Such was the case with Women for a Free Iraq—a group of Iraqi women of different ethnicities and religions, who supported the US administration's invasion of Iraq and toppling of Saddam Hussein in the name of human rights. However, this instrumentalisation of Other women contributes to a backlash against them. This does not empower women but rather shifts the source of their dependency from their national compatriots to the global super power. Moreover, the instrumentalisation of some women's interests and the exclusion of other women's interests within the so-called war on terror has merely politicised women's struggles and intensified the conflict over different notions of femininity in ways that silence Other women.

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