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***Co-opting feminist voices for the war on terror: Laura Bush  
meets Nordic feminism***

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## Co-opting Feminist Voices for the War on Terror: Laura Bush Meets Nordic Feminism

### Introduction

In Tony Kushner's (2003) play, Only We Who Guard the Mystery Shall Be Unhappy, there are three main characters: An angel, Laura Bush and a silent group of Iraqi children. They are sitting in a circle around Laura, who is there to promote the importance of education and freedom. The angel, standing behind the group, politely attempts to make the First Lady aware that the children are dead. They were killed by US forces. Laura wonders why the children are in pyjamas and is informed by the angel that dead children wear pyjamas.

So you are the first Iraqi children I've met and you look real sweet in your PJs. And I am sorry you're dead, but all children love books. [ ... ] That's why I have come – to read to you, to share one of my favorite books with you because when a parent reads to the child, or any adult reads to a child, even if that child is dead, the child will learn to love books, and that is so, so important. (Kushner, 2003)

The First Lady learns how the children died, under what dreadful circumstances because of US bombing. Laura responds that Saddam Hussein is a terrible man:

It isn't right that you should have had to die because your country is run by an evil man [...] he will kill many, many other children all over the world if he isn't stopped. So, so it was, um, necessary for you to die, sweetie, oh how awful to say that [...] (Kushner, 2003)

An allegory? A parody? Pure fiction with no references to ourselves or our political leaders as potential characters in the play? Reading this play such questions came to our mind: we began wondering what kind of war stories are told by female political leaders of our home countries, Norway and Finland. We have three main aims in this article. First, we seek to show how difficult it is to talk about war without co-opting the hegemonic war rhetoric. Second, we examine how gender awareness is co-opted in the Western rhetoric of liberation. Third, we explore the rhetorical tools that are used for co-optation.

Co-optation is a common discursive, rhetorical and linguistic practice that absorbs and neutralises the meanings of the original concepts to fit into the prevailing political priorities. Co-opting of the hegemonic war narrative takes place when the hegemonic ideology on war is not questioned and alternative war stories are rendered silent. Also gendered concepts can be co-opted and mixed with the hegemonic war rhetoric.

Gendered concepts may easily be used in ways not corresponding to the original goals of those who formulated the ideas. Because concepts, such as gender equality, allow for multiple conflicting interpretations, a space is created for rhetoric, including empty declarations. (see also Stratigaki, 2005) Co-opting creates a doxic room that includes large areas of silences. For Pierre Bourdieu (1979), the doxic room is a room whose

doors are never opened. It indicates ‘thoughts which are thought through’. The term originates from the Greek doxa that denotes the non-political or non-discussable. The heterodox (different dogmas), on the other hand, is something that opens for genuine discussions where different opinions can be legitimate.

Our narrative is influenced by feminist rhetorics as well as post-positivist and feminist studies in International Relations (IR) where these authors belong. The study of feminist rhetorics is seldom brought into the discipline of IR, and one of our aims is to examine what can be extracted from political rhetorics using this tool. In order to show how difficult it is to avoid the hegemonic war rhetoric and how easy to mix the hegemonic war narrative with gender awareness, we examine the rhetorical means used as vehicles to transport the hegemonic discourse into a war rhetoric that seeks to take distance from the hegemonic narrative. We demonstrate how rhetorical co-optation is done through ideographs, as they offer a subtle means for transporting ideological commitments. Ideographs may look like ordinary-language terms found in political discourse. Although they may seem to be ordinary-language terms, they are high order abstractions that form the basic linguistic and structural elements of ideology. They represent collective commitment to a particular but ambiguous normative goal, and also justify and legitimate action conducted in the name of the public. Ideographs do offer possibilities for change and contestation when a critical reading is directed at them. (on ideographs see McGee, 1980) In addition to ideographs, our study reveals that the employment of panegyrics, that is, a formal public speech or written verse delivered in praise of a person or thing and the use of ‘gender-neutral’ rhetorics are the means of co-optation.

We have contrasted Norway and Finland with the USA, and particularly with Laura Bush's feminism and rhetoric, to point out differences and similarities in feminisms and their rhetorics of war and also to discuss the ways the hegemonic war rhetoric is co-opted despite different feminist and foreign policy traditions. In Norway and Finland, the strong liberal and equity tradition of feminism could open up heterodox spaces for thinking about war and gender differently than in the USA. The First Lady had to balance between a neo-conservative and a liberal co-opted feminist rhetoric, while the Nordic politicians had to reach a liberal Norwegian and Finnish public. In our focus are, thus, the various war stories told by powerful Western women about Afghanistan in particular, but also about the role of women in peace-building as represented in UN Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. The Afghan war is important, in our view, since it came as a package containing the celebration of 'our' neo-liberalism, modernity as well as the liberation of Muslim women from 'their brown men' (Spivak, 1988) as a part of the ongoing civilizing mission of the West.

The article contains four parts. It starts with a rhetorical presentation of silence, or the rhetoric of silence as we call it. This will serve as a theoretical point of entry to the three following parts. First we will give the voice to the US First Lady, Laura Bush. Since all rhetoric is contextual, it is vital also to examine the cultures within which the rhetoric works. Thereby, we locate the Nordic female politicians' rhetoric in the foreign policy and feminist traditions of Norway and Finland. Then we give voice to two Norwegians and one Finn, three powerful women who all focus on Afghan women and apply feminist

rhetoric, albeit somewhat differently, in their war stories. The selected Nordic women have advanced feminist agendas in a variety of forums in many instances and feminism also underpins their war rhetorics. The rhetoric of the neo-conservative First Lady tells us something about one aspect of feminist discourse, while the rhetoric of three liberal Nordic feminist politicians tells us about another aspect, namely about Western liberal and political feminism and its means of co-optation. In our conclusions we create a heterodox room and give voice to an Afghan woman. Hers is the voice the Nordic women would so desperately like to hear, but hers is also the unsettling message that renders her silent.

#### Rhetoric of gendered silence

Feminist rhetoric is a vague concept and is understood differently by different scholars. Some scholars within feminist rhetorical studies have sought to transform the rhetorical tradition from what is seen as upper-class, agonistic, public, and male into regendered, inclusionary, dialogic and collaborative rhetoric. (Ballif, 1992; Bizzell and Herzberg, 1990) Within the tradition of feminist rhetoric we use the notion of 'rhetorics of silence' that establishes a link between the co-optation of ideographs and silence, namely, what is silenced and left untouched when the co-opted ideographs are at work. The rhetoric of silence, as it is understood here, challenges the dichotomous perspectives that assert the binaries of male-agonistic/female-dialogic. (see Campbell, 1989; Jarrat, 1991; Cloud, 1998; Lippe von der, 2003 and 2007)

A rhetoric of silence may seem peculiar, given the Western tendency to overvalue speech and speaking out, as Cheryl Glenn (2002) writes. Within the rhetorical tradition, the focus is mainly on who is seen and what is read or heard. Most often it seems as the speaker of interest is the one who decides when it is time to talk and time to be silent. It is thus mainly about successful and not successful rhetoric from the perspective of the powerful. We use the expression 'gendered silence of rhetoric' for the traditional gender blind rhetoric. At the latent and ideological level, the traditional perspective implies embedded masculinism; a masculinism from above devoid of any awareness of gender, class, ethnicity or race. What is not heard, read or seen is often more rhetoric than what is heard, read or seen. We argue that there are indeed many silences, particularly in war rhetoric. We concur with Glenn (2002:4) who writes: 'Just as we use words to obfuscate meaning or to buy time, we use silence, sometimes productively, sometimes not – just as we use speech'.

The question is not only whether speech or silence is the most productive, effective or appropriate. Rather, the question is about a rhetoricity of purposeful silence when it is self-selected or when it is imposed.

When silence is our rhetorical choice, we can use it purposefully and productively — but when it is not our choice, but someone else's for us, it can be insidious, particularly when someone else's choice for us comes in the shape of institutional structure. To wit, a person can choose silence, but the choice isn't really hers

because speaking out will be professional suicide. In short, she's been disciplined — and silenced. (Glenn, 2002: 5)

When silence is imposed on us, it may be a question of life and death. Silence may be a means for survival or a conscious way of resistance. When silence is not chosen and thus broken but there is nobody to listen, one's value as human seems to be nil. As Jacqueline Jones Royster puts it: 'What I am compelled to ask when veils seem more like walls, is who has the privilege of speaking?' (Royster, 1996: 36). Who has, claims or is granted this privilege, is of course much more than a question about gender, it is also more than a question about ethnicity, religion and class. It is about all of these factors, and it is about power, too.

The authority of the dominant group and its silences are not always imposed by force on individuals, but offered to them in subtle ways. What is offered for consideration is not just an assertion of another value or a set of values. The twist is that hegemonic discourses, according to Antonio Gramsci (1978), are offered as something you already agree with, as a reflection of your own desires, needs and wants, and in which you can effortlessly recognize yourself. Hegemony thus seems to offer what you already want anyway. This kind of hegemony shortly after September 11 was not threatened in Western countries, and together with the gendered rhetoric of protecting and liberating Afghan Muslim women (and children) included, was an eminently suitable rhetoric for the hegemonic discourse, but less compatible with the discourses, practices and



experiences of most Afghan women. The authority in this case has been forcibly imposed. It is not offered to Afghan (men or) women in any subtle ways.

### Feminism and metamorphosis

War rhetoric, and its use of ideographs, occurs within particular historical moments in which soft or less soft feminism can be mixed with the hegemonic war rhetoric and used strategically to justify and legitimate foreign policy action. In the USA there were several female politicians deploring women's conditions under Taliban rule in autumn 2001.

There were, for example, Condoleezza Rice, a hard-line Pentagon spokeswoman Victoria Clarke and a chief political advisor to Dick Cheney, Mary Matalin. Among those highly influential women was the First Lady, Laura Bush, experiencing a metamorphosis shortly after September 11. She suddenly appeared in public as a newsworthy political spokeswoman – and consoler-in-chief – on national security and international issues.

Inspired by Tasha Dubriwny (2005) as well as by S. Parry-Giles and D.M. Blair (2002), we approach Laura Bush's speech made at an USAID event with President Hamid Karzai. The speech serves as an illustration of her balancing between neoconservative/maternal and liberal/modern feminist rhetoric.

Today, we continue to speak out on behalf of women and children, especially girls, who for 7 years have been denied their basic human rights of health and education.

Thanks to the efforts of the international community, the days of oppression and terror by the Taliban are becoming a memory. However, we must never forget the atrocities that took place at the hands of the Taliban. We will not forget that 70 percent of Afghans were malnourished. [...] Thanks to the international coalition those days are over. The rights and dignity of women and children are once again a priority for the government of Afghanistan. (Laura Bush, 29 January 2002)

The all embracing maternal 'we' is strengthened and the agents are first and foremost 'the international community' and 'international coalition' on whose behalf she speaks, as she in fact is speaking on behalf of and instead of Afghan women. Upholding the saving of Afghan women and children as an ideograph – be it Afghan or US women (and children), with similar rhetorical dimensions as a building block in the 'international community' – she takes no risks and provokes few.

Laura Bush is, as Dubriwny (2005: 89-100) so vividly describes it, drawing upon the traditions of the republican mother pulpit and crafting an argument for women's rights that upholds a traditional understanding of womanhood as well as balancing on a tightrope between the modern binary private/public dichotomy and a liberal feminist rhetoric. <Women-and-children> (for 'womenandchildren' see Enloe, 1990 and 1996) functions in much the same way as abstractions like 'equality', 'democracy', 'modernity' and 'liberty', despite the materiality of both women and children. According to Dubriwny, this indicates the importance of recognizing the ability of material concepts to act as ideology in certain types of discourse. Although ideographs are culture bound,

meaning different things in different cultures some, as <women-and-children>, do, however, appeal to common values all over the world at least to some extent. This indicates an acknowledgment of the blurring lines between words referring literally to the concrete material world and abstractions.

<Women-and-children> derives its meaning from its specific applications, and it works to support visions essential to rallying wartime nationalism and to presenting citizens with a sense of their nation's special benevolence. Laura Bush chooses a combination of domesticity and maternal values with independence and access to the public sphere. This demonstrates at least some erosion of the public/private dichotomy. Her acts of social politicking are mainly practised on topics related to women and children. While the First Lady had to balance between a neo-conservative and a liberal co-opted feminist rhetoric, Norwegian and Finnish female representatives of the power elite were dancing on a different tightrope: They had to reach a fairly liberal Norwegian and Finnish public characterized by equity feminism, i.e. a feminism focused on incorporating women into existing male dominated (market)liberalist ideology. At the same time, they had to avoid too close identification with both the US president, 'the commander in chief', and 'the consoler-in-chief', Laura Bush. In order to contextualize the rhetorics of the Nordic female politicians and contrast it with Laura Bush's rhetoric and feminism, we will briefly examine the Norwegian and Finnish feminist and foreign policy traditions.

Equalities and (non)alliances

Instead of maternal feminism, Nordic feminism is largely characterized by equity feminism. In Norway and Finland, a traditional, but liberal, social-democratic ethos with a heterosexual nuclear family as its focus dominates feminist thinking. Women are seen to be inherently similar to men, and gender equality has been the driving force for the feminist movement in both countries. Male dominance and power have been criticized and one of the goals has been women's equal participation in the domestic political sphere. In Norway and Finland, the state ideology is that of a welfare state with strong labour unions and labour parties, and official feminism coincides with that ideology. (Brandth and Moxnes, 1996; Haviland and Magnusson, 2005: 227-235; Holli and Kantola, 2007; Jónasdóttir and von der Fehr, 1998: 1-20; Teigen and Skjeie, 2003)

However, the tradition is not without its fissures. The dominant Norwegian gender equality policy is also called a 'balance equality' because of its focus on a 50/50 or sometimes 40/60 balanced relationship between women and men in power positions. Gender justice is mainly considered synonymous with this type of gender balance. It is the balance which is the main concern, and the question of equality with whom or with what (interests) is seldom raised. (Holst, 2007) The notion of women's 'responsible rationality' was also developed and used in Nordic feminism. Responsible rationality was pitted against men's instrumental rationality. It was argued that neither instrumental nor value rationality capture the specific women's approach to situations of conflicts of interest. Women have a tendency to identify with those in need of care, and thereby, develop responsible rationality. Women's everyday experiences drive them towards care

that is a rationally developed standpoint rather than an emotional reaction. (Ve, 1998: 326-327) In short, there is a trace of difference feminism in Nordic feminism, although the official feminist ideology is strongly geared towards gender equality. We argue that the Nordic responsible rationality can take the form of 'patronizing rationality' when it seeks to save 'brown women from brown men'.

What the foreign policy rhetorics of Norway and Finland have in common is the story of remote geographical positions which, according to the hegemonic narratives, have historically permitted these states to remain aloof from international engagement. The decision to enter into military alliances was taken a post-Second World War, i.e. with Norway's NATO membership in 1949. Neutrality and non-alignment were preferred foreign policy doctrines in Finland. Ideologically, the links between Norwegian foreign policy and NATO and the USA have been strong. Despite these differences, Norway and Finland have focused less on the East /West dichotomy and more on humanitarian principles, peace, cooperation and disarmament as well as the welfare state. <Solidarity>, <internationalism> and <multilateralism> have been the ideographs around which the Nordic foreign policy rhetoric has been established in the post-Cold War era and in whose name actions are performed. The foreign policy master narrative cherishes the idea that the Nordic countries have a longstanding tradition of participation in UN-led peacekeeping activities, conflict prevention through political dialogue, mediation and high levels of overseas development aid. (on the tradition see Bergman, 2004; Ingebritsen, 2002; Browning, 2002)

Finland did not engage in criticism in its official foreign policy rhetoric, for example, of oppressive regimes during the Cold War. Finnish neutrality was justified by arguing that it offered a way to stay out of the conflicts between the great powers. Finland was seen to be between East and West, and was therefore assumed to have a capacity for bridge-building in international tensions. In the Finnish foreign policy rhetoric, Finland's cautious policy towards the Soviet Union was rationalized by arguing that it was an expression of sheer pragmatism given Finland's geopolitical position. (see e.g. Browning, 2002: 47-72; Forsberg et al., 2003) Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Finland has emphasized its Westernness, its belonging to the 'Western European family'. This has allowed Finland to present itself as true moral actor in world politics.

In Norway's foreign policy tradition there is a long continuum of two different orientations, namely a view that emphasizes Norway's geopolitical position and a view that lays stress on Norway's global responsibility in matters concerning conflict prevention, conflict resolution and post-conflict reconstruction. According to Olav Riste, there were three formative periods in the evolution of Norwegian foreign policy: '1905-1910, when "classic" Norwegian neutralism took shape; the inter-war period, when Norway wrapped herself in the mantle of a missionary for international law and disarmament; and the 1940s during which the country allied itself with great powers and became an active participant in international power politics' (Riste, 2001: 2; see also Leira and Neumann, 2007). As mentioned above, Norway's NATO membership and its close alliance with the USA has shaped the rhetoric on security and defence issues, and

'Atlantism' was widely accepted as the main way of framing Norway's position. (Riste, 2001)

The Norwegian foreign policy rhetoric was re-shaped after the break-down of the Cold War international system. The tendency to emphasize Norway's 'ethical foreign policy' strengthened. Norway now perceives itself as a 'humanitarian great power' and a 'player in international efforts for peace and security'. For example, Foreign Minister Knut Vollebæk (1998) stated that Norway's participation in peacekeeping operations and international crisis management is an integral part of Norway's foreign and security policy. In security policy terms, Norway wants to contribute to 'peace' and 'stability' in the world, and sees itself as having a fundamental moral obligation to promote human rights and peace globally. Thus, humanitarian considerations are also claimed to guide the country's foreign policy. In official rhetoric, Norway does not take part in any war; taking part in military operations is the closest to an explicit war states the official foreign policy rhetoric in Norway.

Finland has participated in the NATO-led ISAF operation in Afghanistan since 2002 and the Finnish participation consists of both military and civilian elements. In the official foreign policy rhetoric, the role of the international community is emphasized and it is seen to provide security for a state that is not yet capable of governing itself. Afghanistan is seen as a 'failed state' where the help of the international community is vital for its reconstruction (Afghanistan Report 2007: 10; Tarja Halonen, 3 April 2008; Ilkka Kanerva, 22 January 2008; Erkki Tuomioja, 18 January 2002) Finland's official rhetoric

on Afghanistan relies heavily on such ideographs as <peace>, <assisted reconstruction> and <international community>. These are offered as something every Finnish citizen should readily agree with without creating room for heterodox to emerge. The cause of the war is not the US intervention in the name of the 'war on terror', but the inability of Afghanistan to maintain its own structures of governance.

Norway also participates in the ISAF operation. The Norwegian foreign policy rhetoric is lavish in its use of metonyms with reference to Afghanistan. For example, the Minister of Foreign Affairs Jonas Gahr Støre urges Afghanistan to get 'back on its feet' (Jonas Gahr Støre, 11 June 2008). The situation is seen to be 'vulnerable' (Jonas Gahr Støre, 18 October 2008). Given the 'vulnerability' and 'falling of a state', the role of the international community, where 'Norway will take its share of responsibility' (Jonas Gahr Støre, 9 October 2005), in assisting the country is emphasized. In short, <international solidarity> and <peacemaker> are the principal ideographs on which the Norwegian's rhetoric on Afghanistan is based.

Despite both Norway's and Finland's foreign policy rhetoric about the peaceful resolution of conflicts, humanitarian principles and moral obligations, the military (and civilian) engagement in the ISAF operation was not questioned. Neither did the liberal and equity feminist tradition in these countries create heterodox for female politicians that would allow a true polyphony on the reasoning of countries' foreign policy towards Afghanistan and unspoken silences to be spoken. Rather, a co-optation took place when Norwegian and Finnish female politicians appropriated at the very early stage of the



intervention in Afghanistan the Western hegemonic discourse on the war. The co-optation operated in three four ways. First, the ideograph <women-and-children> was often evoked and added to the dominant foreign policy rhetoric without questioning the actual rhetorical work it does to support the hegemonic narratives and ideology underlying them. Second, the hegemonic war narrative was mixed with gender awareness. Third, sometimes gender-neutral rhetoric was used to hail into being a collective and unitary Western do-gooder identity and, at the same time, to disassociate Nordic involvement from the US 'war on terror' and silence its consequences. Third, the panegyric of UN Resolution 1325 facilitated the metamorphosis of the militaristic and masculine US-led NATO into a collective peacekeeper that can 'save brown women from brown men'.

#### Liberal Norwegian and Finnish co-optation

The Norwegian social democrat and leader of the governmental defence committee from 2002 to 2005, Marit Nybakk, has for several years been the most important spokes person for Norwegian co-opted feminist rhetoric. She begins many of her articles (and speeches) as follows:

Here in the West we have closed our eyes to the brutal treatment of Afghan women because the injustice did not strike at ourselves. Then we experienced September

11th and the US-led war to fight against Taliban and the terror network al-Qaida.  
This is indeed a necessary war. (Nybakk, 2002)

The interpellation of all people in the West, an all-embracing non-gendered 'we', is characteristic of Nybakk's rhetoric; alluding both to religious rhetoric ('[...] because it did not occur to ourselves/thou should love [...]') and to an important Norwegian author and poet, Arnulf Øverland and his poem 'You shall not tolerate so terribly well the injustice that doesn't strike at yourself [...]' ('Du skal ikke tale så innerlig vel den urett som ikke rammer deg selv [...]') Elements of love for 'the others' as prescribed in the Bible and virile war rhetoric – 'this is indeed a necessary war' – is, however, indicative of some robust strength regardless of gender. Equality between women and men is a part of an ideographic building block within the Norwegian war-and-peace rhetoric. The Laura-like overtly maternal rhetoric is here and also elsewhere absent from the Norwegian war rhetoric. The politicians' positions as benevolent mothers vis-à-vis Afghan women, however, are manifestly present, not only in Laura Bush's rhetoric, but in Nybakk's rhetoric, too. The step from benevolent mother to patronizing rationality is a short one and easy to take.

The omnipotent and gender-neutral 'we' is also hailed into being by the President of Finland, Tarja Halonen, when she speaks about Afghanistan. For her, 'the success of ISAF operation in Afghanistan is our common challenge' since it contributed to security in Afghanistan (Tarja Halonen, 29 June 2004). Similarly, 'the reconstruction of Afghanistan requires a long-standing commitment from the international community'.

(Tarja Halonen, 6 March 2008, see also 17 April 2008; 4 April 2008) The West/'we' is a non-gendered actor, and yet, it is constituted vis-à-vis Afghani women. The ISAF operation has contributed to the 'fact' that President Karzai is now committed to democracy, the rule of law and human rights, including women's and girls' rights (Tarja Halonen, 29 June 2004). A positive and necessary connection between the intervention of the international community and the rights and welfare of Afghani women is established:

During the Talibani regime women were denied schooling and working outside home – and even laughing out loud. Now the situation is better, yet it requires improvements. (Tarja Halonen, 6 March 2008).

<Women-and-children> or <women-and-girls> work as ideographs that represent the collective commitment to save 'brown women from brown men'. Women's welfare is in the hands of international community, which is capable of delivering women's rights in the form of human rights. The ideographs excuse the shouting silences concerning the causes of the war in Afghanistan and the military side of NATO's involvement. They also justify Finnish participation in an operation led by a military organization. The Laura Bush type of maternal feminist discourse does not occur in Halonen's rhetoric. The liberal feminist tradition takes over in the form of women's equal rights.

As the freedom promised by Operation Enduring Freedom and the supportive ISAF seemed difficult to reach, the rhetoric of the Norwegian Minister of Defence, Anne-Grete

Strøm-Erichsen, gets new dressing. In the article, Why do we send soldiers abroad, she writes:

We who every day are working with foreign issues, we know why we are in Afghanistan. For us it is thus easy to forget that it might not necessarily be so for others. (Strøm-Erichsen, 2007)

Her ethos as a peacemaker is threatened and she has to stand up as one-who-knows-better-than-others, i.e. *docere*, which, however, seldom is the way to success. Strøm-Erichsen continuously reminds us that ‘[...] we take part, not in war, but in military engagement’, because ‘we want to contribute to peace and conflict resolution’. This is, she continues, ‘a moral duty and a natural part of our tradition of peace-building and stabilization in the world. Norway’s aim is to prevent weapons of mass destruction from coming into the hands of terrorists’ (Strøm-Erichsen, 2007). The humanitarian rhetoric, the rhetoric of democracy and freedom, is the red-cross thread, running together with traditional gender-neutral or gender blind rhetoric. Marginalization of the feminist rhetoric is used at this stage since hearts and minds after years of warfare are difficult to reach by such interpellation.

In rhetoric antonyms often become synonyms: the transformation of peace into war – peace means war and war means peace – is common and nearly classic in all war rhetorics. Norwegian peace rhetoric persists despite a non-traditional Norwegian foreign policy, i.e. NATO’s and Norway’s out-of-area warfare. ‘Together with 25 other members

of NATO Norway has promised to take part in security and peace-building in Afghanistan. Thereby we will also strengthen our common freedom, culture and civilization', Strøm-Erichsen (2007) also tells us in her article. Her eulogy, i.e. praise, is thus not only pointing to Norway and to NATO, but to Western culture and civilization as such. With this rhetorical maneuver, she is able to include the US without explicitly including the super- or hyperpower in her panegyric of 'our engagement'. The invisibility of Afghan women is compensated by an increased focus on NATO; a NATO that is apparently independent of the USA. In a similar vein, President Halonen, during the visit of the Norwegian royal family to Finland, praised Norway and its peace-building work in Afghanistan. In her eulogy, 'both Norway and Finland offer to the international community help in its work on conflict prevention and resolution' (Tarja Halonen, 5 June 2007). Through these 'gender-neutral' rhetorical moves the unity of commitment in Afghanistan and its moral grounding is produced. There is no need to question the origins of the war and its possible connections to the US 'war on terror' since the whole 'international community' stands for good causes.

Rhetorical practices are, as Kenneth Burke (1950) argues, activities concerning identities. In Norwegian and Finnish war rhetoric this is of utmost importance, too. For rhetoric to be successful, the audiences must feel that their autonomy is upheld and that they can simultaneously experience identification with the rhetorical interpellation. Identification is about being equal and different, unified and separated. Identification with the USA and its foreign policy is difficult to establish with George W. Bush in power. Identification with NATO, ISAF and the UN, on the other hand, is strong. Norwegian and Finnish

politicians of both genders are taking part in a rhetorical tightrope balancing that is different from what is taking place in the USA. Never big enough to be colonial powers and never big enough to initiate a war, Norway and Finland are in this identity story 'peace-building' countries per se.

In President Halonen's speeches, the ideograph <voice> does the rhetorical work of suggesting that there is a single and coherent subaltern woman whose voice the international community can hail into being and hear. She claims that 'by taking into account women's experiences and by hearing the voice of women' women can participate in peace-building in Afghanistan' (Tarja Halonen, 6 March 2006; cf. 18 February 2008). Abstract 'local women' is constituted as a speaking subject with whom particularly the female peacekeepers representing the international community can communicate. (see Tarja Halonen, 6 March 2008; 19 September 2008) Women have a shared voice and mystical communication channel among themselves. The channel is not created among equals in power, but owes its existence to the fact that women 'maintain everyday life' and 'are responsible for the wellbeing of families' (Tarja Halonen, 4 March 2008). This happens during armed conflicts, but there is no doubt that the female personnel on military operations knows intimately the burden of 'maintaining everyday life' and 'being responsible for the wellbeing of families' while taking part in the operation. Equity feminism here becomes reminiscent of difference feminism and responsible rationality when women's special capacities in private arenas are established as sources for the expansion of women's responsibilities into the public sphere.

Strøm-Erichsen's speech in Brussels 2006 to the European Union members on security issues serves as an illustration of promoting self-evident truths within an apparently harmonious security discourse. Having assured the members of the Norwegian support to NATO (and the EU), she pays specific attention to the war in Afghanistan:

First, the international community must coordinate civilian efforts in a better way. Today the civilian aspects of our engagements, in Afghanistan and elsewhere, are often fragmented and uncoordinated. This means that the overall results are less effective. (Strøm-Erichsen, 2006)

Catastrophes for Afghan civilians are presented as insufficient coordination of 'civilian efforts'; they are simply a coordination problem and the problem is 'gender-neutral'. The war in Afghanistan thus seems to be a logistic question rather than a military occupation as such. 'Second', she continues, 'development cannot take place without the necessary level of security. There needs to be close cooperation between NATO, the EU and the UN, as well as with other international actors, including NGO's' (Strøm-Erichsen, 2006).

Here the harmonious unity between opposing organizations is taken for granted, and gender is not an issue. The same organizational harmony is then elevated to include the World Bank:

[...] informal consultations on Afghanistan held this month between senior representatives from NATO, the UN, the EU, the World Bank, is an excellent

initiative to co-ordinate the international community's efforts to support reconstruction and development in Afghanistan. (Strøm-Erichsen, 2006)

Magic harmony seems to exist; 'gender-neutral' organizations of all categories ought simply to co-ordinate their efforts. Strøm-Erichsen concludes by praising the EU decision to promote 'gender equality and gender mainstreaming in crisis management, in line with UN Resolution 1325. This is important progress. Norway puts great emphasis on the UN resolution and has adopted a national action plan to promote gender issues.' (Strøm-Erichsen, 2006) The harmony is at last established as she urges the EU members to conform with Norway and the UN Resolution. The original goal, i.e. women as true participants in conflict and peace processes, is easily obscured, if not fully abandoned. Strøm-Erichsen accommodates with military-strategic priorities and concepts, and gender equality becomes co-opted to fit into this frame.

In sum, feminist potential inherent in the UN resolution and in the original feminist discourse underlying it is co-opted to fit into existing political priorities in both Strøm-Erichsen's and Halonen's rhetorics. Metamorphosis thus occurs at different levels, in different contexts and by different means. NATO also seems to have undergone some kind of metamorphosis and has become an organization for peace-building that is independent of the USA. The gender mainstreaming is so main-streamed that the UN Resolution easily fits into most war stories no matter what is referred to (see also Väyrynen, 2004). This is another aspect of the rhetorical metamorphosis. Rhetorical



flexibility may indicate both openness and ambivalence or it is a rhetorical strategy for constructing war stories as facts.

The similarity in the rhetoric of the three Nordic female politicians is to be found in their promotion of benevolent philanthropy, be it a rhetoric explicitly dressed in feminist guise or without such dressing(s). The common benevolent philanthropy indicates, however, that it is often easier to identify with oppressed women than with strong and potent women – women who also might be in need of support, support based, however, on solidarity as equals. Potent Afghan women speaking themselves about needs and aspirations based on their own experiences might have raised problems for the humanitarian rhetoric of feminist co-optation. Enloe`s (1996; see also Enloe, 2004) scenario of ‘womenandchildren-protected-by-statesmen’ may indeed be paraphrased by another scenario, namely, a ‘womenandchildren-protected-by-stateswomen’ scenario.

### Concluding heterodox

The ideographic abstractions so common in foreign policy rhetoric refer to a world with little resemblance to the real world. The imaginative geography embedded in various mediated protection scenarios ought, in our view, to be challenged. In the real world the relation between protector and protected is often experienced as a relation between oppressors with no-body really protected (see also Stiehm, 1982). Our narrative about gendered war rhetoric sheds some light on what is at stake at the global level when

gender awareness is included, an awareness so easily co-opted in the Western rhetoric of liberation. Who has the privilege of speaking ‘when veils seem more like walls’, as Royster puts it, is an issue more important than the veiling of bodies.

The rhetoric of gendered silence has for most Afghan women been a chosen silence in public. It is a silence primarily based on a choice to survive or not to survive. The choice was not taken due to the absence of needs, to passivity or to indifference. Some Afghan women have, however, risked their lives and for decades cried out asking the world, the international community, to listen. Few heard their voices and even fewer listened. Gayatri C. Spivak’s (1988) essay Can the Subaltern Speak? is as relevant now as it was twenty years ago. In our view, the subaltern can often speak, but the question is ‘are we really listening and can we hear her?’ (see Väyrynen, 2010). We have demonstrated how that listening seems to be extremely difficult for those in power.

When the subaltern speaks, it requires openness to her message from the part of the listener because it may be unsettling, something we do not want to hear. For example, Malalai Joya, Afghanistan’s youngest and most out-spoken parliamentarian, states:

The US government removed the ultra-reactionary and brutal regime of Taliban, but instead of relying on the Afghan people, pushed us from the frying pan into the fire and selected its friends from among the most dirty and infamous criminals of the ‘Northern Alliance’, which is made up of the sworn enemies of democracy and human rights, and are as dark-minded, evil, and cruel as the Taliban. The Western

media talks about democracy and the liberation of Afghanistan, but the US and its allies are engaged in the warlordization, criminalization and drug-lordization of our wounded land. Today the Northern alliance leaders are the key power holders and our people are hostage in the hands of these ruthless gangs of killers. Many of them are responsible for butchering tens of thousands of innocent people in the past 2 decades but are in power and hold key positions in the government. (Malalai Joya, 12 April 2007)

Like other Afghan women and men opposing the war, she has not been worthy of being listened to from the Western perspective. Joya reminds us that the US/Western dominated war game is a fact and not a fiction, it is a war going on in concrete parts of the world, felt on the skins of concrete people and filled with an uncountable number of dead bodies without pyjamas. Seen, however, as fiction, we do not know how many characters are left wondering if the angel has flown away.

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