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### Gender, orientalism and representations of the 'Other' in the War on Terror

Maryam Khalid <sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia

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## Gender, orientalism and representations of the ‘Other’ in the War on Terror

Maryam Khalid\*

*University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia*

After 9/11, images of the Middle Eastern or Muslim ‘Other’ have been highly visible in the Western world. Although published 30 years ago, Edward Said’s *Orientalism* provides a useful critical lens through which to examine how these images function in War on Terror discourses. Feminist IR scholars have also highlighted the role gendered representations play in War on Terror discourse, and ‘orientalism’ as a tool of critical analysis must account for this. Using a concept of ‘gendered orientalism’ and applying it to three particularly prominent images from the War on Terror, I illustrate how gendered and orientalist logics in official and unofficial War on Terror discourses construct masculinities and femininities according to race, manipulating and deploying representations of the ‘Other’ to justify military involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq.

**Keywords:** gender; orientalism; War on Terror; Afghanistan; Iraq; representations

### Introduction

In the aftermath of 9/11, gendered and orientalist depictions of the Middle Eastern or Islamic ‘Other’ have been highly visible in the Western world in both official discourses and mainstream media. In particular, US War on Terror discourses have legitimised and normalised assumptions about gender and race. This article will develop a framework that deploys concepts of gendered and orientalist power to decode dominant discourses surrounding three significant post-9/11 events.

During the course of the War on Terror, a range of binaries situating the ‘West’ in opposition to the ‘East’ – for example, good vs. evil, civilised vs. barbaric, rational vs. irrational, progressive vs. backward – have been invoked. These binaries are deployed in US War on Terror discourse in ways that are gendered and orientalist, that is, through harnessing and manipulating perceived differences in gender, gender roles, and sexuality, along racial lines. The power of Western representations of the ‘East’ was explored in detail in Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, and I draw on his work to uncover the power relationships that underscore representations of the ‘Other’ in the War on Terror.<sup>1</sup>

Orientalism as a form of critical analysis is key to understanding US War on Terror discourse, as it deals with the relationship between depictions by Westerners of non-Western subjects, and the material power relations that arise out of such depictions. Western constructs of Easterners as ‘other’ have been used to justify conquest and colonialism for over two centuries. These constructs have been both racialised and gendered and continue to function in contemporary times. The basic tenets of Said’s thesis remain relevant in the War on Terror context, and, taking into account historical context and the importance of gender, I use orientalism as an

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\*Email: maryam.khalid@student.unsw.edu.au

1 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

analytical tool to critically engage with dominant War on Terror discourses in order to destabilise and unravel orientalist and gendered justifications for intervention.

Using the examples of the US-led interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq, I examine how gendered and orientalist visual representations of the 'Eastern Other' have been deployed to facilitate intervention as part of the War on Terror. I use gender as an analytical category, encompassing the social construction of 'women', 'men', 'femininity', and 'masculinity', acknowledging the power and inequality that comes from ascribing particular gender or gender traits to people(s).<sup>2</sup> Drawing on representations by the media, the Bush administration, and liberal, US-based feminist group the Feminist Majority Foundation (FMF), I argue that women's rights discourses have been co-opted into a broader discourse of gendered orientalism that marks 'Other' women as voiceless victims of a barbaric (male) 'Other' enemy, and positions the USA as enlightened, civilised, and justified in its military interventions. To illustrate this, I draw on three particularly prominent images from the War on Terror – the image of the 'veiled oppressed Muslim woman', images of US soldier Jessica Lynch's 'rescue' from Iraqi forces, and photographs of prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib prison. Locating these in official and unofficial discourses, I examine how these images have been deployed in the support of a gendered orientalist discourse that constructs categories of masculinities and femininities (and ranks them) according to race. For example, a benevolent and enlightened USA, protective of women and controlled in its use of violence, is positioned as superior to the backward, barbaric and uncontrolled masculinity of the 'Other'; the femininity of Lynch becomes a symbol of the superiority of US civilisation (through US women's performances of femininity) and the barbarity of the 'Other' (through the 'Other' woman who is oppressed and brutalised). Ultimately, the discourse of gendered orientalism functions to preserve and promote US masculinist power, and to justify violence under the banner of the War on Terror.

## Aesthetics, orientalism and gender

As Cynthia Weber argues, although it is often disregarded by mainstream IR, 'much politics is conducted through ... visual language'.<sup>3</sup> Understanding visual language (expressed through visual media such as photos, film, web pages) as a way in which we obtain information about the world requires seeing it as a form of representation that allows others to 'read' meanings and values attached to various artefacts.<sup>4</sup> Visual language (or indeed any language) does not reveal a pre-existing 'truth' about the world, but, rather, it creates meanings about the world through representing it. Whereas a mimetic approach assumes there is a pre-given meaning or truth to things or events, an aesthetic approach reveals there is a gap between a form of representation and that which is represented.<sup>5</sup> As Roland Bleiker argues, 'the inevitable difference between the represented and its representation is the very location of politics'; political representations (along with other representations) are necessarily incomplete. That is, their meaning is not pre-given or intrinsic, but is shaped by the knowledge and values of those who create and perceive them, as we 'make sense' of a representation by drawing on existing knowledge and aesthetic values that are 'deeply embedded and tacitly assumed'.<sup>6</sup>

2 Christine Sylvester, *Feminist Theory and International Relations in a Postmodern Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 4; Iris Marion Young, 'The Logic of Masculinist Protection: Reflections on the Current Security State', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 29 (2003): 1–25, at 2.

3 Cynthia Weber, 'Popular Visual Language as Global Communication: the Remediation of United Airlines Flight 93', *Review of International Studies* 34 (2008): 137–53, at 137–8; Stuart Hall, 'The Work of Representation', in *Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices*, ed. Stuart Hall (London: Sage, 1997), 13–74, at 5.

4 Weber, 'Popular Visual Language as Global Communication', 138.

5 Roland Bleiker, 'The Aesthetic Turn in International Political Theory', *Millennium – Journal of International Studies* 30 (2001): 509–33, at 510.

6 *Ibid.*, 511; Bonnie Mann, 'How How America Justifies its War: A Modern/Postmodern Aesthetics of War and Sovereignty', *Hypatia* 21 (2006): 147–63, at 150.

Orientalism as a form of critical analysis is key to understanding and decoding the values that shape the visual representations I have chosen, as it deals with the relationship between depictions by Westerners of non-Western subjects and the material power relations that arise out of such depictions. Orientalism, according to Said, is 'the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient – dealing with it by making statements about it, authorising views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient'.<sup>7</sup> Examining scholarly, fictional, and travel writings and their representations of the 'Orient', Said concluded that 'orientalism' characterised (Eurocentric) Western writings, which established binary oppositions that along with 'othering' the Orient also represented the 'West' self-referentially and positively, as everything the 'East' was not. Thus, orientalist binaries referred to an irrational, backward, exotic, despotic and lazy 'East', while the 'West' became the pinnacle of civilisation: rational, moral and Christian.

Although the representations of the East produced by the West did not necessarily resemble the 'reality' of the 'East', they served to define the nature of the 'East' in Western knowledge and ultimately contributed to Western control of the 'East'. Said argued that, over time, this type of 'knowledge' about the 'East' led to the construction of a tradition which then consistently influenced all further learning and knowledge about the Orient – much like a self-sustaining myth. This tradition is then 'orientalist'.<sup>8</sup>

As a form of critical analysis used to decode 'Western-centric' understandings, orientalism is relevant to US War on Terror discourse precisely because it uncovers the ways in which non-Western cultures, traditions and peoples are and have been perceived in the 'West' through binary oppositions depicting the 'East' as irrational, backward, exotic, despotic and lazy, and the West as rational, moral and the pinnacle of civilisation. Although he was primarily examining colonial Europe, Said's notion of orientalism can be applied to the American context, noting the differing historical and political contexts of European and American involvement in the Middle East. The USA has a long history of political, economic and cultural engagements with the Middle Eastern and the Muslim world, and post-colonial scholars, including IR scholars, have noted that Said's work offers ways of understanding Western interactions with the East that remain relevant beyond the colonial context.<sup>9</sup>

The nature of orientalism as deeply related to Foucauldian theories of power and knowledge means that *Orientalism* can be applied beyond the historical context on which the book was immediately focused. The repository of representations which orientalist discourse draws upon is fluid and shifting, constantly being added to by the changing dominant (but multifaceted) discourses of the West.<sup>10</sup> Ziauddin Sardar traces images of Arabs and Muslims as anti-Western 'Others' in the contemporary West to the 800 years of orientalist thought developed during Western interaction with Islam that resulted in deeply ingrained reflexes and ideas that thereafter affected the West's experiences with new 'Orient'. Sardar argues 'from film to fiction, foreign

7 Said, *Orientalism*, 3.

8 *Ibid.*, 91–4.

9 For example, Priya Chacko, 'Modernity, Orientalism and the Construction of International Relations' (Paper presented at the Oceanic Conference on International Studies, Canberra, Australia, July 14–16, 2004); Geeta Chowdhry and Sheila Nair, eds., *Power, Postcolonialism, and International Relations: Reading Race, Gender, and Class* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002); L.H.M. Ling, 'The Monster Within: What Fu Manchu and Hannibal Lecter Can Tell Us About Terror and Desire in a Post-9/11 World', *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 12 (2004): 377–400; Meghana Nayak and Christopher Malone, 'American Orientalism and American Exceptionalism: A Critical Rethinking of US Hegemony', *International Studies Review* 11 (2009): 253–76; Andrew J. Rotter, 'Saidism without Said: Orientalism and U.S. Diplomatic History', *The American Historical Review* 105 (2000): 1205–17.

10 Yasmin Jiwani, 'Orientalizing "War Talk": Representations of the Gendered Muslim Body Post-9/11 in *The Montreal Gazette*', in *Situating "Race" and Racisms in Space, Time and Theory*, ed. Jo-Anne Lee and John Lutz (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2005), 178–203, at 181; Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East since 1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 9.

policy to polemics, Islam is seen and evoked as a “problem”, resulting in an impasse: Islam as an insurmountable obstacle between Western civilization and its destiny: globalization’.<sup>11</sup> Douglas Little, Melani McAlister, and Dag Tuastad explore this in terms of a specifically American orientalism (or neo-orientalism) in both official and popular discourses. Drawing on the colonial practice of employing binaries of civilised ‘West’/barbaric ‘East’, ‘American orientalism’, according to these scholars, is expressed in contemporary deployment in mainstream books, films and news reports of contradictory images of Arabs/Muslims as both too weak to progress politically yet strong enough to pose a threat, coupled with the corollary perception of the superiority of American civilisation, images which contribute towards legitimising the need for controlling or policing the region.<sup>12</sup>

Although *Orientalism* did not discuss gender in depth, Said’s work has been utilised by feminist scholars who have read women and gender into the uncovering of the relationship between power and representation in orientalist discourses.<sup>13</sup> Feminist and gender-conscious works on orientalism have examined the impact of gendered orientalism in a colonial context. For example, Melika Mehdid argues that orientalist depictions during colonial times, created by both men and women, served to objectify female colonial subjects.<sup>14</sup> As Mohja Kahf explains, the image of the oppressed Muslim/Arab woman became important during the building of the French and British empires in the nineteenth century which, ‘in subjugating whole Muslim societies, had a direct interest in viewing the Muslim woman as oppressed’.<sup>15</sup> The relationship between ‘female liberation’, orientalism, patriarchy, and imperialism has been examined by Lila Abu-Lughod, Leila Ahmed, Margot Badran, Claire Midgley, and Gayatri Spivak, amongst others, who have demonstrated the importance of the language of women’s rights in the service of empire.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, the idea of ‘saving brown women’ was taken on by many British feminists as much as it was by male British colonialists. Drawing on orientalist notions of civilisation and barbarity, the colonial project put forward an image of victimised and subjugated women for whom the ‘civilising mission’ of colonialism would spell freedom and liberation. However, although British colonialists urged British women to support the liberation of their Indian ‘sisters’, colonialism actually undermined the feminist cause. Imperialists did not show a genuine commitment to feminism, often trying to control feminism ‘at home’; colonialism itself was highly patriarchal and oppressive and feminism’s co-option into this project ultimately weakened the fight for women’s rights, both at home and abroad.<sup>17</sup>

11 Ziauddin Sardar, *Orientalism* (Philadelphia, PA: Open University Press, 1999), 54–5.

12 Douglas Little, *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East Since 1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 314; McAlister, *Epic Encounters*, xiii; Dag Tuastad, ‘Neo-Orientalism and the New Barbarism Thesis: Aspects of Symbolic Violence in the Middle East Conflict’, *Third World Quarterly* 24 (2004): 591–9, at 591–2.

13 Lila Abu-Lughod, ‘*Orientalism* and Middle East Feminist Studies’, *Feminist Studies* 27 (2001): 101–113; Sondra Hale, ‘Edward Said – Accidental Feminist: *Orientalism* and Middle East Women’s Studies’, *Amerasia Journal* 31 (2005): 1–5; Reina Lewis, *Gendering Orientalism: Race, Femininity and Representation* (London: Routledge, 1996); Meyda Yegenoglu, *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

14 Melika Mehdid, ‘A Western Invention of Arab Womanhood: The “Oriental” Female’, in *Women in the Middle East: Perceptions, Realities, & Struggles for Liberation*, ed. Haleh Afshar (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1993), 18–58, at 19, 25.

15 Mohja Kahf, *Western Representations of the Muslim Woman: From Termagant to Odalisque* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999), 9.

16 Abu-Lughod, ‘*Orientalism* and Middle East Feminist Studies’; Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992); Margot Badran, *Feminists, Islam and Nation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995); Claire Midgley, ‘Female Emancipation in an Imperial Frame: English Women and the Campaign Against Sati (Widow-Burning) in India, 1812–30’, *Women’s History Review* 9 (2000): 228–47; Gayatri Spivak, ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?: Speculations on Widow Sacrifice’, *Wedge* 7 (1985): 120–30.

17 Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, 153–4.

As J. Ann Tickner points out, gendered narratives in which men must save women and children have often been used to justify military intervention.<sup>18</sup> I follow those feminist IR scholars who conceive of gender and gendered identities not as ‘natural’ or pre-given, but as socially constructed, determining ‘what counts as “woman” and as “man”’.<sup>19</sup> As such, they ‘produce’ people (barbaric Afghan men, benevolent Western men, oppressed Muslim women, for example) so that men and women become ‘the stories that have been told about “men” and “women” and the constraints and opportunities that have thereby arisen as we take to our proper places’.<sup>20</sup> Gender is in this sense a ‘standard of normalization’, a discursive regulation.<sup>21</sup> Using gender as an analytical category allows us to look at how gendered identities ‘give meaning to the organization and perception of ... knowledge’.<sup>22</sup> Gendered identities do not exist independently of other factors, and must be viewed as intertwined with, for example, race or ethnicity if we are to understand the hierarchical organisation of identities.<sup>23</sup>

Thus, taking gender and orientalism together as analytical approaches, we can examine how gendered and orientalist identities, meanings, and images construct and organise the way we give meaning to and interpret our world, its people and events, and ‘the positions and possibilities for action within them’.<sup>24</sup> That gendered narratives in the War on Terror have also relied on the (re)production of orientalist stereotypes has been examined by feminists in terms of ‘official’ narratives on women’s rights in the War on Terror (Krista Hunt, Ratna Kapur, Meghana Nayak), representations of the veil and narratives of female liberation (Jill Steans, Shannon Walsh, Sonali Kolhatkar), and a ‘clash of civilisations’ mentality (Dana Cloud, Jasmine Zine).<sup>25</sup> Indeed, women’s rights rhetoric is a central part of War on Terror discourses as articulated by media, officials, and US-based liberal feminists, whereby concerns for the very real abuses of women’s rights in Afghanistan and Iraq become co-opted into a discourse that is deployed to justify military violence.<sup>26</sup>

## Gendered orientalism in the War on Terror

At the outset of the War on Terror, the role that the USA envisaged for itself was clear – the 9/11 attacks reinforced the self-perception of the USA as ‘the brightest beacon for freedom and

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- 18 J. Ann Tickner, *Gendering World Politics: Issues and Approaches in the Post-Cold War Era* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 57.
- 19 Judith Squires and Jutta Weldes, ‘Beyond Being Marginal: Gender and International Relations in Britain’, *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 9 (2007): 185–203, at 186.
- 20 Sylvester, *Feminist Theory and International Relations in a Postmodern Era*, 4.
- 21 Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 41.
- 22 Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 31.
- 23 R. W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995); Charlotte Hooper, *Manly States: Masculinities, International Relations, and Gender Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).
- 24 Young, ‘The Logic of Masculinist Protection’, 2.
- 25 Krista Hunt, ‘The Strategic Co-optation of Women’s Rights: Discourse in the “War on Terrorism”’, *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 4 (2002): 116–21; Ratna Kapur, ‘Unveiling Women’s Rights in the War on Terror’, *Duke Journal of Gender, Law & Policy* 9 (2002): 211–26; Meghana Nayak, ‘Orientalism and “Saving” US State Identity after 9/11’, *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 8 (2006): 42–61; Jill Steans, ‘Telling Stories About Women and Gender in the War on Terror’, *Global Society* 22 (2008): 159–75; Shannon Walsh, ‘A Blindfold of Compassion? Women as Pawns in the New War’, *Feminist Media Studies* 2 (2002): 153–5; Sonali Kolhatkar, ‘“Saving” Afghan Women: How Media Creates Enemies’, *Women in Action* 1 (2002): 34–6; Dana Cloud, ‘“To Veil the Threat of Terror”: Afghan Women and the “Clash of Civilizations” in the Imagery of the U.S. War on Terrorism’, *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 90 (2004): 285–306; Jasmine Zine, ‘Between Orientalism and Fundamentalism: Muslim Women and Feminist Engagement’, in *(En)Gendering the War on Terror: War Stories and Camouflaged Politics*, ed. Krista Hunt and Kim Rygiel (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2006), 27–50.
- 26 Krista Hunt, ‘“Embedded Feminism” and the War on Terror’, in *(En)Gendering the War on Terror*, ed. Hunt and Rygiel, 54; Ann Russo, ‘The Feminist Majority Foundation’s Campaign to Stop Gender Apartheid’, *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 8 (2006): 557–80, at 559.

opportunity'.<sup>27</sup> The US government's conception of the world, and America's place in it drew heavily on binaries of good and evil, and marked the USA as the leader of the 'civilised world':

This war [War on Terror] will take many turns we cannot predict. Yet I am certain of this: Wherever we carry it, the American flag will stand not only for our power, but for freedom. . . . We fight, as we always fight, for a just peace – a peace that favors human liberty. We will defend the peace against threats from terrorists and tyrants. . . . And we will extend the peace by encouraging free and open societies on every continent. Building this just peace is America's opportunity, and America's duty.<sup>28</sup>

Bush also proclaims that that the 'United States welcomes our responsibility to lead in this great mission' and it is clear that this vision of the world is to be consolidated through American military power.<sup>29</sup>

Although the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq were undertaken primarily for retaliatory or pre-emptive purposes (response to 9/11 and weapons of mass destruction), the repeated references to 'good', 'evil' and 'women's rights' in official rhetoric point to another layer of justification.<sup>30</sup> As the USA placed itself in the role of defender of the free world and liberator of the oppressed, and linked the oppressors with 'fundamentalist Islam', this 'secondary' justification operated according to the logic of orientalism. The them/us dichotomy at play in contemporary Western representations (for example, civilised vs. barbaric, good vs. evil) serves the purpose of 'Othering' the represented and constructing the creator of the representations in opposition to those who are 'Othered'. Orientalist justifications for intervention in the War on Terror depend on these binaries as the division of the world into 'civilised' and 'barbaric'. With irrational violence and misogyny intrinsic to 'their' world, the US-led military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq can be presented as *necessary* in order to bring civilisation, democracy, and equality to the oppressed and to discipline the barbaric enemy.<sup>31</sup> In terms of War on Terror discourse, this can be seen in the dichotomy between the benevolent, civilised and moral masculinity of the West and the backward, barbaric, oppressive, deviant masculinity of the 'brown man', the 'free' Western woman and the oppressed, subjugated Muslim woman. These gendered orientalist representations rely on these *binaries*, but also employ gendered and racialised *hierarchies*. For example, the multiple masculinities and femininities seen in the War on Terror are organised in a hierarchy that places 'barbaric brown men' and 'oppressed brown women' at the bottom of the scale.

The images examined in the next sections of this article are shaped by a gendered orientalist logic that constructs and ascribes different masculinities and femininities to men and women according to race. This logic marks out the male 'enemy' as embodying a dangerous masculinity that is irrational and expresses itself in acts of barbarism, such as the oppression of women. At the same time, this enemy is also feminised by the superior masculinity of the USA, for example through the Abu Ghraib abuses. The West, led by the USA, is marked out by this superior and exaggerated masculinity and yet is also benevolent and paternal. 'Other' women are ascribed

27 George W. Bush, 'Statement by the President in his Address to the Nation', September 11, 2001, <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010911-16.html>.

28 George W. Bush, 'President Bush Delivers Graduation Speech at West Point' (United States Military Academy, West Point, New York, June 1, 2002), <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/06/20020601-3.html>.

29 National Security Strategy of The United States of America, September 2002, Foreword by President George W. Bush, <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/nsc/nss/2002/index.html>.

30 For example, National Security Strategy of The United States of America; George W. Bush, 'No Nation Can be Neutral in this Conflict' (remarks by the President to the Warsaw Conference on Combating Terrorism, November 6, 2001), <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/11/20011106-2.html>; see also Laura J. Shepherd, 'Veiled References: Constructions of Gender in the Bush Administration Discourse on the Attacks on Afghanistan Post-9/11', *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 8 (2006): 19–41, 10; Nayak, 'Orientalism and "Saving" US State Identity'; J. Ann Tickner, 'Feminist Perspectives on 9/11', *International Studies Perspectives* 3 (2002): 333–50.

31 Nayak, 'Orientalism and "Saving" US State Identity after 9/11', 46.

with feminine traits that deny them agency and require their liberation, whilst Western women are allowed to engage in masculine activities to bolster the image of the USA as a civilised, benevolent and egalitarian nation, but ultimately remain inferior to the masculine and militarised US self. The moral superiority of the USA draws, in a sense, on ideals of feminism in terms of the celebration of the 'free' US woman (embodied for example in Jessica Lynch) and the desire to 'save' the oppressed 'Other' woman. US masculinity is ultimately marked out as acceptable as it is controlled; its power and (military) violence are directed at the enemy and its benevolence is used to save those who are deemed to be helpless victims of this enemy. Thus, orientalist logic in the War on Terror is gendered in this way; that is, the identities constructed in US War on Terror discourse rely on harnessing and manipulating perceived differences in gender and gender roles, and sexuality, creating the infantilised 'Other' woman who needs to be saved, the dehumanised barbarian, and the masculine and paternalistic US/Western self. I turn now to my three chosen images to illustrate how this is achieved.

### The 'veiled oppressed Muslim woman' and the 'barbaric male enemy'

The image of the 'veiled oppressed Muslim woman' is pervasive and salient in War on Terror discourse. Indeed, the burqa and other forms of veiling are again under increasing scrutiny, most recently in the burqa-ban debates in Europe. Here the veil and burqa have again become prominent, playing a significant role in the construction of 'Western' identity in Europe. The burqa again has come to symbolise the non-European 'Other' which must be excluded, and the danger this 'Other' poses to liberal democratic notions of society, and to 'our' civilisation, where freedom and gender equality is valued.<sup>32</sup> These discourses rely on long-held assumptions about the helplessness of 'Eastern' women and the misogyny of 'Eastern' men. In the lead-up to the 2001 Afghanistan war, these assumptions were drawn on once again as the image of the oppressed Muslim woman became highly visible in mainstream news media and official discourse.<sup>33</sup> In the months after 9/11, the number of media stories on Afghan women sharply increased, and pictures of women wearing burqas appeared on the covers of widely-read magazines such as *New York Times*, *Business Week*, *Newsweek*, and *Time*, alongside reports of their subjugation.<sup>34</sup> An article in *USA Today* explicitly conflated the act of removing burqas and American-led 'liberation', as women 'threw them [burqas] on the fire and lit the way for their rescuers'.<sup>35</sup> President George W. Bush claimed in 2002 that the victory over the Taliban had 'liberated the women of Afghanistan'.<sup>36</sup> State Department Spokesman Richard Boucher linked liberation to the removal of the burqa, as these liberated Afghan women could now be seen 'sometimes even without wearing a burqa'.<sup>37</sup>

32 See, for example, Valérie Amiraux, 'The Headscarf Question: What is Really the Issue?', in *European Islam: Challenges for Public Policy and Society*, ed. Samir Amghar, Amel Boubekeur, and Michaël Emerson (Brussels: Centre for European Policy Studies, 2008), 124–43, at 134; Annelies Moors, 'The Dutch and the Face-Veil: The Politics of Discomfort', *Social Anthropology* 17 (2009): 393–408, at 399–402; Joan Wallach Scott, *The Politics of the Veil* (Princeton, NJ and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008).

33 Carol A. Stabile and Deepa Kumar, 'Unveiling Imperialism: Media, Gender and the War on Afghanistan', *Media, Culture & Society* 27 (2005): 765–82, at 773.

34 *Ibid.*, 772. For example, from 12 September 2001 to 1 January 2002 there were 93 mainstream newspaper articles and 628 broadcast programmes on Afghan women's situation under the Taliban, compared to 15 articles in mainstream newspapers and 33 broadcast programmes between 1 January 2001 and 11 September 2001. See also Cloud, 'To Veil the Threat of Terror'.

35 Paul Wiseman and Jack Kelley, 'Women's Escape was Straight out of a Movie; CIA Agent, A Signal Fire and A Helicopter Led to Freedom', *USA Today*, November 16, 2001, 10A.

36 George W. Bush, '2002 State of the Union Address' (Washington DC, January 29, 2002), <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/01/20020129-11.html>.

37 Richard Boucher, Assistant Secretary and State Department Spokesman, 'Freedom is a Foreign Policy', Remarks to the Pilgrims Society of Britain (London, United Kingdom, November 28, 2002), <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/rm/15567.htm>.



The cover image of the November 2001 edition of *Time* magazine was typical of the portrayal of Afghan women in the lead-up to and during the Afghan war. This particular image featured Afghan women with their burqas removed along with the caption 'Liberation: Women in Kabul showed their faces in public for the first time in years'. This image and the accompanying caption is a significant example of the ways in which orientalist knowledge is manipulated to require intervention. The picture was part of a photo essay on the fate of Afghanistan and Afghan women one month after war began, and was followed a week later by a special issue titled 'Lifting the Veil', featuring an Afghan woman on the cover and an accompanying story claiming that military intervention had freed Afghan women, with the removal of the burqa providing evidence of this liberation.<sup>38</sup> In Iraq the plight of women was used to similar effect through the use of descriptions of rape rooms and a reference to women's role used to frame women's political participation as a sign of progress that the USA would bring to Iraq.<sup>39</sup> US Administrator to Iraq Paul Bremer's contention that women's rights were 'abused terribly' by Hussein's regime was followed by the claim that the USA was committed to promoting women's rights in Iraq.<sup>40</sup> These types of representations continue even now – a recent issue of *Time* carried an article arguing for continued US occupation in Afghanistan for the sake of Afghan women, with the cover featuring a mutilated Afghan girl who became a sort of spokesperson for the occupation.<sup>41</sup>

Narratives of protection and salvation of women in US War on Terror discourses have not only relied on deploying images of women defined by their dress, but also on racialising violence against women. Images of the 'oppressed Muslim woman' were often accompanied by commentary that, for example, attributed Afghan women's abuse to the 'tribal and conservative' nature of 'Afghan society'.<sup>42</sup> At the same time, official and media discourses located patriarchy 'over there', rather than something that also exists in 'our world'. As Chandra Talpade Mohanty notes, successful constructions of oppressed 'Other' women are created by reference to Western women who are presented 'as educated, as modern, as having control over their own bodies and sexualities, and the freedom to make their own decisions'.<sup>43</sup> For example, when speaking at an event on global progress in women's human rights in 2004, President George W. Bush and his wife Laura Bush mentioned the struggle for women's rights in the USA only in terms of the suffragette movement, and used examples from the Muslim world or Middle East to illustrate contemporary struggles for women's rights.<sup>44</sup> Another *Time* article stated 'nowhere in the Muslim world are women treated as equals',<sup>45</sup> – the implication is that gender equality has been achieved 'here' and that patriarchal violence is the domain of 'the East', located in 'their culture'.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, the complexities of gendered and patriarchal violence, and the role factors such as economic policy, globalisation, domestic affairs, international politics or even US foreign policy might play in the oppression of Afghan, Iraqi or other 'Middle Eastern/

38 Nancy Gibbs, 'Even Chaos is a Gift', *Time*, November 26, 2001, 30–32; see also 'Time Magazine Special Report: Lifting the Veil', December 3, 2001.

39 Nayak, 'Orientalism and "Saving" US State Identity after 9/11', 49; Shepherd, 'Veiled References', 26.

40 Donna Miles, 'Bremer Notes Human Rights Progress in Iraq' (American Forces Press Service, Washington, December 10, 2003), <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=27654>.

41 Aryn Baker, 'Afghan Women and the Return of the Taliban', *Time*, August 9, 2010.

42 Richard Lacayo, 'The Women of Afghanistan', *Time*, December 3, 2001, 34.

43 Chandra Talpade Mohanty, 'Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse', *Feminist Review* 30 (1988): 61–88, at 65.

44 President, Mrs Bush Mark Progress in Global Women's Human Rights (March 12, 2004), <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2004/03/20040312-5.html>.

45 Lisa Beyer, 'Islam: The Women of Islam', *Time*, December 3, 2001.

46 Michaele L. Ferguson, 'Feminism and Security Rhetoric in the Post-September 11 Bush Administration', in *W Stands for Women*, ed. Michaele L. Ferguson and Lori Jo Marso (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2007), 191–220, at 199–201.

Muslim' women are ignored.<sup>47</sup> By contrast, the 'West' comes to represent successful female liberation.

Constructing the Afghan/Muslim/Middle Eastern 'everywoman' as a victim in need of liberation, whose liberation is achieved by the US invasion (as lifting the veil is supposed to demonstrate) also serves the important purpose of marking out the deviant masculinity of the enemy 'Other' and linking it to security. The men who attacked the US on 11 September 2001 are the same 'faceless cowards' who demonstrate 'barbaric behaviour' as they are bent upon 'slitting the throats of women'.<sup>48</sup> The masculinity of this enemy is deviant, barbaric and irrational, and is marked as such by implicit reference to 'acceptable' performances of masculinity based on attitudes towards women – in terms of the orientalist binary, 'our men' are benevolent and protect women (because women need protecting), whilst 'barbaric men' have an irrational hatred of women. Thus, War on Terror discourse, in ascribing certain masculinities and femininities to male and female 'Others', assigns orientalist attributes (barbaric vs. civilised) according to notions of traditional gender roles in which women are protected and men are protectors. The logic that constructs 'Other' women as powerless victims to be saved requires the simultaneous construction of 'Other' men as barbaric, backward and a threat to be contained – as gender violence comes to symbolise 'the world the terrorists would like to impose on the rest of us',<sup>49</sup> military intervention becomes not just legitimate, but necessary. The USA endorses a masculinist and militaristic solution (Bush claims that American soldiers will 'save civilisation itself'),<sup>50</sup> but at the same time embodies a 'benign' paternalism as the military intervention is accompanied by a benevolent desire to 'teach' people in the backward 'East' how to empower themselves.

These kinds of representations gained even more salience and authenticity through the responses of the FMF to the Bush administration's military interventions into Afghanistan and Iraq. Although there was, and continues to be, much feminist critique and condemnation of the gendered and orientalist nature of the Bush administration's interventions and the use of women's rights rhetoric to justify the Afghanistan and Iraq wars, the FMF provided sustained support for the Afghan war. A liberal-feminist group that has campaigned to end gender apartheid in Afghanistan since 1997, the FMF welcomed the Bush administration's women's rights rhetoric, seeing military intervention as way to end the Taliban's oppression of women and later citing women's freedom to remove their burqas and go out in public unaccompanied by male relatives as evidence of their liberation and the success of the war.<sup>51</sup> This lent much support to the gendered orientalist discourse of the War on Terror, adding to already dominant official and media representations of wholly oppressed 'Other' women, backward 'Other' men and a civilised, feminist-friendly USA. In support of the US-led war in Afghanistan, the FMF stated in 2001 that 'the US and its allies must rescue and liberate the people, especially the women

47 Alison Jaggard, "'Saving Amina': Global Justice for Women and Intercultural Dialogue', *Ethics & International Affairs* 19 (2005): 55–75; Stabile and Kumar, 'Unveiling Imperialism'; Russo, 'The Feminist Majority Foundation's Campaign to Stop Gender Apartheid', 566–7; Jacqui True, 'The Political Economy of Violence Against Women: A Feminist International Relations Perspective', *Australian Feminist Law Journal* 32 (2010): 39–59.

48 George W. Bush, 'Guard and Reserves Define Spirit of America' (Remarks by the President to Employees at the Pentagon, September 17, 2001), <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010917-3.html>; George W. Bush, 'Honoring the Victims of the Incidents on Tuesday, September 11, 2001' (Proclamation, September 12, 2001), <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010912-1.html>.

49 Laura Bush, 'The Taliban's War Against Women', National Radio Address (Crawford Texas, November 17, 2001), <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/11/20011117.html>.

50 President George W. Bush, 'Remarks by the President To United Nations General Assembly' (UN Headquarters, New York, November 10, 2001), <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/11/20011110-3.html>.

51 Janelle Brown, 'A Coalition of Hope', *Ms Magazine* (Spring 2002): 65–74; Feminist Majority, 'Stop Gender Apartheid in Afghanistan', [http://www.helpafghanwomen.com/Global\\_Petition\\_Flyer.pdf](http://www.helpafghanwomen.com/Global_Petition_Flyer.pdf), both quoted in Russo, 'The Feminist Majority Foundation's Campaign to Stop Gender Apartheid', 563, 568, 574.

and children ... the link between the liberation of Afghan women and girls from the terrorist Taliban militia and the preservation of democracy and freedom in America and worldwide has never been clearer'.<sup>52</sup> Echoing the language used by the Bush administration and mainstream media, the FMF's statements are powerful in their impact because they become co-opted into the dominant discourse, providing further evidence of the oppressed/barbaric 'Other' and the benevolence of US intervention. The FMF's statements also make more plausible the use of women's rights rhetoric by the Bush administration. For example, Secretary of State Colin Powell, speaking at an event marking International Women's Day, put the USA forward as 'the champion of human rights and well being of women ... worldwide' and linked US foreign policy with a 'joint struggle' with US women's rights supporters 'on behalf of women of the world'.<sup>53</sup> This alignment with 'supporters of women's rights' becomes more believable at least in part because of the support lent by the FMF to both the Bush administration's foreign policy and the orientalist representations of the 'Other' that justify it.

### Do these women need 'saving'?

Ultimately, this gendered orientalist logic depends on the totalising image of the oppressed Muslim/Arab woman. Representing the voices of those who are deemed unable to speak for themselves, orientalist logic requires that experiences of these women that might undermine the civilised barbaric/victim saviour dichotomy are overlooked.

Alongside the very real and horrific abuses against women in Afghanistan, there has been a longstanding resistance movement in the form of the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA), which has made a significant impact in the struggle for women's rights.<sup>54</sup> In Iraq, the rhetoric of war securing women's rights disregarded the fact that women in Iraq, although undoubtedly subjected to human rights abuses, had high levels of participation in public life and were not the mute, helpless victims they were assumed to be.<sup>55</sup>

However, mainstream representations in support of the war put forward an essentialised image of Arab/Muslim women as proof of the threat posed by the enemy 'Other'. For example, whilst RAWA was briefly courted by the Bush administration, once it began requesting aid rather than intervention, and questioning the administration's commitment to women's rights, the organisation became less important to the Bush administration.<sup>56</sup> There was also a strong reluctance in mainstream media to spell out the central role the USA played in helping to create the conditions for (and supporting) the Taliban and Saddam's regime, conveniently ignoring the human rights abuses that the 2001 wars were supposed to remedy.<sup>57</sup>

Ann Russo points out that the FMF's campaign to 'save Afghan women' was also, for the most part, silent on US involvement with the Taliban. Moreover, she writes, 'the FMF never questions the underlying premises of the US invasion and the right to control the future of Afghanistan', even as it highlighted US failures in terms of the inability to provide adequate security forces and follow through on securing women's rights in Afghanistan.<sup>58</sup> Sonali Kolhatkar argues

52 Feminist Majority Foundation, 'Feminist Daily News Wire', September 18, 2001, <http://feminist.org/news/newsbyte/printnews.asp?id=5802>.

53 Colin Powell, 'Secretary of State Colin L. Powell and Under Secretary for Global Affairs Paula J. Dobriansky at Reception to Mark International Women's Day' (Washington, DC, March 8, 2002), <http://www.usinfo.org/wf-archieve/2002/020308/epf503.htm>.

54 Anne E. Brodsky, *With All Our Strength: The Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

55 Nadje Al-Ali and Nicola Pratt, *What Kind of Liberation? Women and the Occupation of Iraq* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 156–7.

56 Steans, 'Telling Stories About Women and Gender in the War on Terror', 164, 170.

57 Abu-Lughod, 'Orientalism and Middle East Feminist Studies'; Stabile and Kumar, 'Unveiling Imperialism'.

58 Russo, 'The Feminist Majority Foundation's Campaign to Stop Gender Apartheid', 559.

that images of Afghan women marching for freedom and secularism, with their own texts on the causes of and solutions to their problems, are not as useful in gendered orientalist discourse as a helpless woman who needs saving, as it is the latter that justifies ‘civilising’ the ‘Other’ through military interventions.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, a selective memory and selective representations of the ‘Other’ are vital to the ‘saving brown women’ scenario. Thus, although there were some cursory references to Afghan and Iraqi women’s agency, the dominant narrative remained that of the ‘oppressed veiled woman’.

## Camouflaging gendered orientalism

The ‘rescue’ missions to save Afghan and Iraqi women were not the only War on Terror narratives that were shaped by gendered orientalism. Two prominent stories – the Jessica Lynch rescue and the Lynndie England/Abu Ghraib incident – illustrate another way in which gendered orientalist discourses and representations were deployed, serving to justify intervention and also to camouflage the paternalistic and imperialist nature of the interventions. Drawing again on discourses of women’s rights, the USA positioned itself as masculine, strong, egalitarian and civilised, with the ‘ideal type’ of US femininity (in the form of Lynch) playing a supporting role.

Some of the most powerful images of the Jessica Lynch story include the footage of Lynch’s rescue and pictures of Lynch, partially covered by an American flag, being carried by US marines. The story was presented in the media as the rescue of a female soldier who had displayed heroism in her willingness to ‘fight to the death’ against Iraqi forces.<sup>60</sup> Although much of the story later turned out to be fabricated, I examine the form it took when being released to the public.<sup>61</sup> Lynch was held up as a heroic soldier and fighter, her presence in the armed forces and her involvement in war became an example of the equality and liberation enjoyed by US women.<sup>62</sup> The image of a woman – Lynch – in military uniform serves to further substantiate the claim that the USA is a land of civilised values, where women are given the same opportunities as men (evidenced here by the inclusion of women in the military). Although this image and the related narratives reference gender equality, a logic of gendered orientalism operates to exploit superficial allusions to such equality in order to camouflage the construction of a very traditionally masculine US self and the barbaric ‘Other’ in broader service of the justification of the War on Terror.

As Laura Sjoberg points out, whilst Lynch was held up as an American heroine and symbol of US gender equality, her agency was in fact limited by her femininity. Lynch was a hero because she fought – but the implication was that she fought *despite* being a woman.<sup>63</sup> Lynch was celebrated as a soldier and fighter, yet she was ultimately held up as the symbol of the heroic masculine power of the US military, and the uncontrolled masculinity of the enemy ‘Other’. Although the battle she was involved in highlighted the perceived ‘equality’

59 Kolhatkar, ‘“Saving” Afghan Women’.

60 Susan Schmidt and Vernon Loeb, ‘“She Was Fighting to the Death”’, *Washington Post*, April 3, 2003, A01; see also the unnamed US Army officials quoted in ‘Jessica Lynch: Media Myth-Making During the War’ (September 20, 2004), <http://www.journalism.org/resources/research/reports/war/postwar/lynch.asp>.

61 John Kampfner, ‘The Truth About Jessica’, *The Guardian*, May 15, 2003. This was confirmed by Lynch herself in a 2003 interview (‘“Too Painful”: Jessica Lynch Says She Can’t Remember Sexual Assault’, *ABC News*, November 2003, [http://abcnews.go.com/sections/Primetime/US/Jessica\\_Lynch\\_031106-1/html](http://abcnews.go.com/sections/Primetime/US/Jessica_Lynch_031106-1/html)). See also Laura Sjoberg, ‘Agency, Militarized Femininity and Enemy Others: Observations From the War in Iraq’, *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 9 (2007): 82–101, at 86.

62 Deepa Kumar, ‘War Propaganda and the (AB)Uses of Women: Media Constructions of the Jessica Lynch Story’, *Feminist Media Studies* 4 (2004): 297–313, at 302–3; Veronique Pin-Fat and Maria Stern, ‘The Scripting of Private Jessica Lynch: Biopolitics, Gender, and the “Feminization” of the U.S. Military’, *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 30 (2005): 25–53, at 25, 27–8, 35–6.

63 Sjoberg, ‘Agency, Militarized Femininity and Enemy Others’, 85.

of white American women, much of the story focused on the actions of the *men* who rescued her. The images of a distressed Lynch surrounded by her (overwhelmingly male) rescuers illustrates that the threat posed by the 'Other' enemy – outlined earlier in relation to 'Other' women – extends also to 'our' women. The manufactured heroism of US marines' daring rescue of a female soldier (who was, it turned out, not shot at and not injured by Iraq soldiers and in fact cared for rather well by her captors) served to harness the orientalist image of a barbaric and ruthless Arab/Muslim male who poses an uncontrolled threat to (white) women.

What is also notable about the Lynch images is that they feature Lynch over and above the other soldiers captured along with her. As Cristina Masters argues, it had to be Lynch who was rescued, as it was the image of the white woman that was at stake here.<sup>64</sup> Shoshana Johnson, an African-American single mother of two (whose story most closely resembled the embellished version of Lynch's capture) could not symbolise the US self here. Under the racialised logic of orientalism, the image of an African-American woman cannot be utilised in the same way as a white woman in this scenario as this would not accord with notions of purity and (orientalist) Western identity.<sup>65</sup> Brunner argues that orientalist notions of the masculinity of the 'Eastern' male as uncivilised also inherently ascribe primitiveness, ineptness and a certain amount of weakness to the barbarised 'Other'.<sup>66</sup> The heroic and successful 'rescue' of Lynch by US forces symbolically reasserts this by simultaneously constructing the male 'Other' as both hyper-masculine and effeminate. The male (it is assumed) Iraqi soldiers in this story are both a threat to Western values and Western (female) soldiers, but are also overcome by the US army. In this way, the discourse of gendered orientalism exploits an element of women's rights discourses to achieve the goal of positioning the USA as civilised and moral, yet also requires observance of traditional gender roles (situating its own masculine character as superior to expressions of femininity) to secure US superiority through the masculine power of its military.<sup>67</sup>

The deployment of gendered identities in the photographs of prisoners at Abu Ghraib, and the resulting scandal, illustrates the workings of gendered orientalism in a particularly disturbing way. Here, the images of sexualised torture served to feminise the (male) 'Other' and simultaneously reassert the superiority of US masculinity. The images from Abu Ghraib illustrate how the racialised 'Other' becomes homosexualised and penetrable. Further, 'expert' commentators in response to the release of these pictures highlighted the humiliation the prisoners must have felt, often linking this to an honour-based society, claiming to have insight into the psychological profile of the (male) Muslim mind.<sup>68</sup> This reveals more about the 'Western mind' in War on Terror discourse, which draws on orientalist assumptions that the Muslim male's greatest fear is to be dominated by a woman (and as Mann points out, it is unsurprising that this conclusion is reached as being dominated by women is humiliating in American logic also).<sup>69</sup>

Notions of heteronormativity are also central to the mainstream Western responses to the abuses at Abu Ghraib. Mainstream responses to the photos appeared to be particularly concerned with the 'humiliation' the Iraqi male prisoners must have suffered because of implications of sexual abuse, in particular homosexual acts, in Arab society. The concern is thus less about

64 Cristina Masters, 'Femina Sacra: The "War on/of Terror", Women and the Feminine', *Security Dialogue* 40 (2009): 29–49, at 37.

65 Melissa Brittain, 'Benevolent Invaders, Heroic Victims and Depraved Villains: White Femininity in Media Coverage of the Invasion of Iraq', in (*En*)*Gendering the War on Terror*, ed. Hunt and Rygiel, 73–96, at 83; Claire Sjolander and Kathryn Trevenen, 'One of the Boys? Gender Disorder in Times of Crisis', *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 12 (2010): 158–76, at 159–60.

66 Elgin M. Brunner, 'Consoling Display of Strength or Emotional Overstrain? The Gendered Framing of the Early "War on Terrorism" in Transatlantic Comparison', *Global Society* 22 (2008): 217–15, 236.

67 Anna Agathangelou and L.H.M. Ling, 'Power, Borders, Security, Wealth: Lessons of Violence and Desire from September 11', *International Studies Quarterly* 48 (2004): 517–38.

68 Mann, 'How America Justifies Its War', 158–9.

69 *Ibid.*, 159.

the inherent brutality of the acts but more about the perceived 'knowledge' of Arab/Muslim society's expectations of (heterosexual) men, where being raped and made powerless is akin to being treated like a woman, and humiliating.<sup>70</sup> This is assumed to be more so when inflicted by a woman – the impact of this particular type of abuse gains its strength from the undermining of male supremacy that is supposedly integral to backward and unenlightened 'Eastern' societies.<sup>71</sup>

Rendering Iraqi males powerless through the imagery of the abuse that took place at Abu Ghraib also serves to reinforce the differences between 'Other' and US power and masculinity outlined earlier. The images of England abusing prisoners are particularly relevant here. Images of US soldiers abusing Iraqi male prisoners feminise these prisoners and reinforce the superiority of US power and 'masculinity' identified through the previous images. Images of a *female* US soldier achieves this more so and differently, than seeing pictures of male soldiers inflicting abuse on male prisoners as it inverts what is perceived to be the 'natural' power relationship between men and women. A gendered logic also operates in this scenario to prevent the acceptable (but inferior) femininity of those such as Jessica Lynch from being 'sullied' by the 'deviant' femininity of England.<sup>72</sup> Perceived differences in gender roles and traits were harnessed to create 'acceptable' and 'unacceptable' masculine and feminine identities in this context, with England being cast as 'unfeminine' and 'deviant'. England became a scapegoat of sorts for the Abu Ghraib scandal, painted as 'not a real woman', as embodying something other than the ideal of femininity that the US aspired to project. Her appearance and other indicators of her lack of conformity to the 'traditional' feminine ideal type allows her actions to be written off as something other than indicative of an endemic attitude of 'barbarism' within the US military.<sup>73</sup> The USA then can still be projected as a place of virtue, maintain its superior moral position, with the impact of its military might still apparent. However, as Timothy Kaufman-Osborn explains, sexualised violence is a central part of the masculinised culture of the military. What Kaufman calls the 'logic of emasculation' – stripping (male) prisoners of their masculine gender identity through feminisation – is not simply an anomaly. What President George W. Bush tried to write off as 'disgraceful conduct by a few American troops who ... disregarded our values' are in fact acts of imperialist and racist and gendered violence and deliberately implemented tactics of masculinised militarism.<sup>74</sup>

## Conclusions

Gendered orientalism creates categories of people according to race and gender, defining through these categories what 'men' or 'women', 'us' and 'them', 'Afghan/Arab/Muslim' and 'Western' are and do. The images analysed in this article illustrate how this orientalist logic constructs the 'Other' hierarchically according to gender. 'Other' women are constructed as being in need of salvation and 'Other' men are demonised, feminised and dehumanised. This then allows the USA to construct itself by reference to these 'Othered' people – as morally and

70 Timothy Kaufman-Osborn, 'Gender Trouble at Abu Ghraib?', *Politics & Gender* 1 (2005): 597–619, at 610; Sjoberg, 'Agency, Militarized Femininity and Enemy Others', 94–5.

71 Melanie Richter-Montpetit, 'Empire, Desire and Violence: A Queer Transnational Feminist Reading of the Prisoner "Abuse" in Abu Ghraib and the Question of "Gender Equality"', *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 9 (2007): 38–59, at 47, 51–2; Zine, 'Between Orientalism and Fundamentalism', 33.

72 Brittain, 'Benevolent Invaders, Heroic Victims and Depraved Villains', 85, 89.

73 Robin Riley, 'Huda, Rihab, and Jessica: Imperialism, Representation and the Construction of Gender in the War on Iraq' (paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Studies Association, Montreal, Canada, March 17, 2004).

74 George W. Bush, 'President Outlines Steps to Help Iraq Achieve Democracy and Freedom: Remarks by the President on Iraq and the War on Terror' (United States Army War College, Pennsylvania, May 24, 2004), <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2004/05/20040524-10.html>; Kaufman-Osborn, 'Gender Trouble at Abu Ghraib?'

physically superior, and ultimately legitimate in pursuing military intervention. These gendered orientalist discourses also make appeals to women's rights discourses, and, in doing so, attempt to camouflage the patriarchal and militarised masculinity that drives the projects justified by these discourses. Anti-war IR feminists have highlighted that (imperialist) militarism has rarely helped the women it purports to.<sup>75</sup> Feminist criticism of the Bush administration's co-optation of women's rights discourses in its security rhetoric has also highlighted the lack of a genuine commitment to women's rights both abroad and at home.<sup>76</sup> Unsurprisingly, the military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq that were supposed to 'save' women have led instead to increasingly worse situations, as war exacerbates existing economic and social problems, and creates new ones, that have ultimately had a negative impact on these women.<sup>77</sup> Whilst there were promises of support for Afghan and Iraqi women's rights, these pledges seem to have fallen through, as women were largely marginalised in post-war political processes and the re-building of Afghanistan and Iraq.<sup>78</sup>

Thus, the narratives of 'female liberation' and rhetoric of women's rights that characterised much War on Terror discourse ultimately ring hollow, and expose the very women who were to be 'saved' to new forms of violence. In addition to legitimising military interventions, gendered orientalist War on Terror discourse has, in the Abu Ghraib scandal, also attempted to depict sexualised and racialised violence as an aberration rather than an expression of an endemic orientalism in the US military that normalises sexualised violence against the 'Other'. And the scapegoating of England, made possible by gendered logics, resulted in an anti-feminist backlash in the USA.<sup>79</sup>

In this context, the FMF's contribution to gendered orientalist discourses, through its support for the Bush campaign in Afghanistan, is disturbing. As Mrinalini Sinha argues, feminisms are 'never articulated outside macropolitical structures that condition and delimit their political effects'.<sup>80</sup> In addition to the mainstream media and official representations that construct 'Other' women as mute and helpless and 'Other' men as irrational and barbaric, the FMF has become complicit in reproducing discourses that allow US hegemony and imperialism to operate under the pretext of paternalistic protection, 'liberation' and 'freedom'.<sup>81</sup> The status of women's rights in Afghanistan and Iraq (or indeed in the USA, or anywhere else in the world) is a legitimate concern, particularly for feminists, but adequate engagement with these issues demands that we interrogate motives for foreign policy and the ways in which they are justified, if we are to avoid accepting (and possibly contributing to) hegemonic discourses, and the gendered, racialised and sexualised violence they rationalise. This also important because feminist complicity with the colonial project can have the effect of tainting 'indigenous feminisms', making it all too easy for some to discredit all feminisms as a tool of Western

75 See for example, Cynthia Enloe's *Banana's Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990) and *Maneuvers: The International Politics of Militarising Women's Lives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Zillah Eisenstein, *Against Empire: Feminisms, Racism and the West* (Melbourne: Spinifex, 2004).

76 For example, the Bush administration's stance on reproductive rights and violence against women has been heavily criticised – see the collection of essays in Laura Flanders, *The W Effect: Bush's War on Women* (New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2004); Ferguson and Marso, *W Stands for Women*.

77 Al-Ali and Pratt, *What Kind of Liberation?*; Amnesty International, 'Afghanistan: "No-One Listens to us and No-One Treats us as Human Beings"', October 6, 2003, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/ASA11/023/2003>; Human Rights Watch, *We Want to Live as Humans: Repression of Women and Girls in Western Afghanistan* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2002).

78 Rosemarie Skaine, 'War, Islam, and Politics', in *Women of Afghanistan in the Post-Taliban Era* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2008), 31–56; Elaheh Rostami-Povey, *Afghan Women: Identity and Invasion* (New York: Zed Books, 2007); Al-Ali and Pratt, *What Kind of Liberation?*, 88–95.

79 Kaufman-Osborn, 'Gender Trouble at Abu Ghraib?', 600–603.

80 Mrinalini Sinha, 'Mapping the Imperial Social Formation: A Modest Proposal for Feminist History', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 25 (2000): 1077–82, at 1078.

81 Russo, 'The Feminist Majority Foundation's Campaign to Stop Gender Apartheid', 559.

domination.<sup>82</sup> This concern has emerged in the War on Terror context, as some conservatives in Afghanistan equate the Bush campaign for ‘female liberation’ with an attack on Afghan religion and culture.<sup>83</sup>

Critical engagement with these discourses and the representations that create and reproduce them (undertaken largely through alternative readings of these discourses and representations) serves to destabilise and unravel the racialised and gendered justifications for intervention, and critical feminism has been particularly useful in developing the critical tools to do this. A postcolonial and feminist understanding of gender, race, power, and violence is essential for undertaking the important task of decoding dominant discourses and the representations that create and reproduce gendered orientalisms. Critical feminist IR provides alternatives to the dichotomies that shape dominant understandings of US foreign policy in this context, with its focus on recovering knowledge about the marginalised and oppressed. In particular, an anti-imperialist feminist IR can, as Russo explains, help us to resist hegemonic and imperialist power by uncovering the ways in which this power operates, so that we disrupt rather than (re)produce relations of imperialist domination.<sup>84</sup> In order to do so, employing a feminist-informed, self-reflexive research ethic can help make us attentive to the ways in which our own privileges shape not only our approaches to conducting research, but also the sorts of research questions we conceive of.<sup>85</sup>

In addressing gender, orientalism and ‘Self’/‘Other’ relationships in a post-9/11 world, we must, as Meghana Nayak argues, ask questions that identify and probe binaries of race and gender, interrogating how and why some are constructed as victims of violence and deserving of empathy, and for what purpose.<sup>86</sup> The role of gendered orientalist tropes in justifying policies of intervention has a long history. These discourses require continued interrogation because they are harnessed so easily and so often. By contesting the ‘truths’ of gendered and orientalist knowledge and uncovering the power relations underlying these representations, the legitimacy and power of these discourses can be challenged.

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## Note on contributor

Maryam Khalid is a PhD candidate in the School of Social Sciences and International Studies at the University of New South Wales, Australia. Her research focuses on the ways in which neo-imperial power relations are legitimated through the prism of gender and orientalism, with particular attention to the War on Terror.

82 Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, 166–7; Nawal El Saadawi, *The Nawal El Saadawi Reader* (London: Zed Books, 1997), 32; Hunt, “‘Embedded Feminism’ and the War on Terror”, 54.

83 Hunt, “‘Embedded Feminism’ and the War on Terror”, 51.

84 Russo, ‘The Feminist Majority Foundation’s Campaign to Stop Gender Apartheid’, 559–60.

85 Brooke Ackerly and Jacqui True, ‘Reflexivity in Practice: Power and Ethics in Feminist Research on International Relations’, *International Studies Review* 10 (2008): 693–707, at 694–6, 704.

86 Nayak, ‘Orientalism and “Saving” US State Identity after 9/11’, 57.