

U.S. Warrior Princesses Condi and Hillary

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Please see my SEXUAL DECOYS; GENDER, RACE AND WAR IN IMPERIAL DEMOCACY (Zed Books, London; Palgrave, New York, forthcoming, January, 2007) for a fuller accounting of these arguments.

Condoleezza Rice refers to the unrelenting bombing in Lebanon as “the birth pangs” of a new democratic middle east. But these bombs create lasting damage and devastation, and are not fleeting pangs of any sort. And they birth nothing but rather kill, maim and destroy everything in their path. The only thing birthed here are new hatreds and horror. The war in Lebanon is a miscarriage of justice, a still-birth. Do not use the language of female bodies to camouflage this atrocious war.

Hillary Clinton has spoken in support of Israel defending itself against Hezbollah and says that the U.S. will continue to stand behind Israel because it stands for American values. Since when is the wanton destruction of civilian communities, and the killing of sixty innocents as in Qana, Lebanon an American value that any of us would want to make claim to? How can we abide turning Lebanon into a country of refugees and displaced persons and call this American?

Condoleezza Rice has orchestrated the war in Iraq for Bush and Hillary has given her support for this reckless war and continues to do so. Most recently she has said that enforcing a pull out date in Iraq would be counter productive. Both Condi and Hillary are doing the scut work for a hyper-militarized government that makes war across the globe. As such they stand as sexual decoys for democracy. They play a role of deception and lure us into a fantasy of gender equity rather than depravity.

A decoy is a misrepresentation—one thinks one sees something that is not really there. If gender were not malleable in the first place, it could not be used as a decoy as readily. Gender here applies to the cultural construct of woman; as distinguished from biological sex as in female. So Hillary and Condi are female, but don't confuse this with women's rights or democracy of any sort. Condi jets around the world meeting with dignitaries and Hillary's senate coffers are filled and over-flowing. They are both monied power-houses. But their agendas are masculinist, militarist, and neo-liberal.

Hillary will win her Senate seat again. Supposedly this is because she moved herself to the center and has been moving from the center towards the right ever since. This is partly wrong, and partly right. She did not have to move towards the center from the left because neither she nor Bill was elected in '92 as old liberals. It was the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC) that she and Bill were beholden to. They were 'new'—leaner and meaner--Democrats at the start; better known as neo-liberals who argued that the global economy required a heightened competitiveness and competition.

Hillary's health care initiatives failed not because she was too radical, but because she was not radical enough. She never seriously backed single payer health coverage

even though universal health coverage had been promised to the electorate. She had a centrist politics then, and it wasn't very feminist, even if she said she didn't want to make chocolate chip cookies. And it wasn't very liberal as she sat on Wal-Mart's board and remained silent about worker's rights and the minimum wage. Both she and Bill endorsed the limited status of abortion as needing to be "safe, legal, and rare". Notice there is no mention of availability.

More recently as senator from New York she was asked by the Pentagon to join a select panel that is considering improving military readiness. Given her voting record she ranks among the dozen most conservative Democrats in the Senate. She is the perfect sexual decoy. She is depicted as too liberal, too feminist, too critical of women who bake cookies. In the process she de-sexes gender while re-gendering sex. And so does Condoleezza Rice. Thinking of either of these women as feminist or as icons of democracy makes about as much sense as the wars they authorize.

The Bush administration has other decoys in place as well like Karen Hughes as ambassador to the Muslim east, and Meghan O'Sullivan, the 36 year old national security adviser for Iraq and Afghanistan. Bush's cow-girls orchestrate his war time strategies. They live a life that is beholden to earlier struggles of sexual equality and civil rights, while they disclaim connection to these movements. Condi Rice says she has gotten where she is because she was brought up to depend on herself and work hard. At the same time she acknowledges the civil rights movement when she tries to gain acceptance for the continuance of the Iraq war. In these instances she readily uses the civil rights movement as proof of how hard it is to build democracy; that even the U.S. had a long process of struggle to achieve democracy for all its citizens. And she offers herself as an example of the success of democracy. She speaks about her childhood, defined by racism, in Alabama to celebrate how far she and the U.S. have come from all this. She nudges fledgling-democracies to work hard, like we have, to make it work.

She has sacrificed family to be counted as a loyal player even if sometimes in neo-mammy form. She occupies a space close to the President without creating racial or sexual discomfort; she either remains the child, or the mammy, and he the father or the son. She is called the warrior princess and replaced Colin Powell, who was deemed too much of a girlie-man. She is described as both dominatrix in her military coats and high boots; and also prudish as well as diplomatic in her pumps and pearls. Other times she is outspokenly militarist as she continued to defend the newest forms of "extreme interrogation" in spite of the horrors at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo.

Obviously, females can make war, just like men; or maybe not just like men, but like manly women. Meanwhile 22-year-old Suzanne Swift is AWOL and under arrest after refusing to return to her sexually abusive military superiors in Iraq and Hillary and Condi have nothing to say. They do not speak on behalf of female soldiers, or against their sexual harassment or for peace. Then again, sex harassment is a sticky point for Hillary given Bill. Condi just turns her face elsewhere.

Comparisons are regularly drawn between Condi and Hillary. Some have even speculated that they might run against each other in the 2008 Presidential election. Both present a variety of genders; sometimes stiff and pert and de-sexualized; other times not. Condi has no husband in sight at present and Hillary has a husband who is a known misogynist of long standing. The nation is just asked to forget his forays and pretend that marriage works.

Condi and Hillary wield power, but not as women—whatever this might mean today—and not for women and their rights—but for an imperial democracy that destroys women's equality and racial justice. Imperial democracy mainstreams women's rights discourse into foreign policy and militarizes women for imperial goals. Imperial feminists speak on behalf of the U.S. but in particular militarist voices. Women's rights rhetoric is used to manipulate and disguise war making in the name of democracy. No one's rights—especially not women's—are ever recognized in war.

Sexual decoys are females in drag and the drag allows us to think that they represent the best of democracy when they don't. Politics is image and mirage. But politics and war is also incredibly and unforgettably real especially if you happen to have to pay the consequences up front, with hunger, and pain, and death, and yearnings for peace. So for the thousands of people dying and being maimed in the imperial wars of this century I cannot abide the decoy politics that allows female bodies to be used to cover over the insanity.

We need a politics where gender is not defined by one's biological body. But given that we are nowhere close to this I at least don't want a female body used as a decoy for fascistic democracy. Nor do I want women's rights rhetoric to be used to wrap the bombs of war as was done in Afghanistan and Iraq. Even though Saddam Hussein is under arrest, and the Taliban though gaining power is still not fully back in control, women's lives are no better in these so-called new democracies. Wars rage and people cannot find electricity, food, hospitals, roads, and so forth.

The people of Lebanon, Syria, Israel, Iraq, and Afghanistan desperately want peace. Without peace, democracy, whatever its form, has no meaning. These countries don't need the U.S. imperial democracy in female drag. This is in no one's interest, especially not the women of Iraq, Afghanistan, Lebanon, and Israel. And it is not in the interest of women in the United States. So to Condi and Hillary we must say: NOT IN OUR NAME.