

THE VOICE OF WOMAN IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY:  
WOMEN NOT WIVES--HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON

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(Resumen)

El presente artículo sale en defensa de Hillary Clinton frente a la misoginia de que es objeto en Estados Unidos, y más concretamente en la revista *Newsweek*. Su imagen es distorsionada para representar a una mujer amenazadora para la seguridad nacional del país y cuyas ansias de poder y "conspiraciones" pueden hacer tambalear a la Casa Blanca. Por otro lado, contrasta la imagen de ilusión, esperanza y equilibrio que representa su marido, Bill Clinton. Jamás se reconocerá la profesionalidad e inteligencia de Hillary Clinton en un país predominantemente machista en la ocupación de altos cargos.

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I find it ironic to speak about Hillary Rodham Clinton in the context of a series called "The Voice of Woman in Contemporary Society." I know the sound of President Bill Clinton's voice very well. Late at night, after a few glasses of wine, I can even imitate his Arkansas accent. But I have not, to my knowledge, actually "heard" the voice of Hillary Rodham Clinton. I do not know what she sounds like. Very early in the nominating process, a year before the campaign, Clinton opponents tried to discredit him by linking him romantically with another woman, Gennifer Flowers. At that time Hillary Rodham Clinton appeared with her husband on the U.S. television show, *60 Minutes*, where they both answered questions. But as Bill Clinton drew closer to winning the presidency, she participated by addressing mostly smaller groups, unlikely to be covered by network news. Her considerable strengths were channeled in a direction that would spare the sensibilities of the male-dominated power elite in both the mass media and the Democratic party, as well as whomever among the country's potential Clinton supporters might be disturbed by the sound and image of--of what? What could possibly be perceived as excessive, as unusual, as threatening about a typical, if highly talented,

middle-aged professional woman, whose politics are mainstream, who is married and a mother, gainfully employed, and clearly very supportive of her husband? This is the question I would like to address today through some of the images and descriptions of Rodham Clinton pouring forth from an apparently astounded U.S. press in recent weeks. These images, I think, offer a fresh perspective on some of the most urgent social issues in the U.S.--health care, child care, reproductive rights. They also offer some sobering insight into the profound connections between misogyny and a version of nationalism being horrendously enacted in Bosnia-Herzegovina, just a few hours south of my Fulbright home in Budapest.

Carmen Flys's "ad hoc" title for my paper, "Women, not Wives," is wonderfully apt in more ways than one. Take the use of maiden versus married names, for example. Like many women of her generation--my generation--Hillary Rodham did not assume her husband's name when she got married. Keeping her maiden name signified, within the semiotic system of the times, that her identity and her work were her own--not derivative of her husband's identity and position. She used this name during her first term as first lady of Arkansas, during which she also practiced law full-time. It was when Bill Clinton, having lost re-election as governor, ran a third time that her name became Hillary Clinton. (Her name, as well as his "arrogance," were both campaign issues.) This time Bill Clinton won. She continued to use Hillary Clinton throughout the presidential campaign, which he obviously also won. Since the inauguration, she has settled on the slightly less self-effacing Hillary Rodham Clinton.

But even this mild gesture has not gone unremarked. As a small squib in the February 24, 1993 issue of the *International Herald Tribune* notes, the use of given name, maiden name, and married name is the same formula that conservative Republican Marilyn Tucker Quayle, the wife of the former Vice President, has chosen, now that she is resuming her law practice.<sup>1</sup> But, as Calvin Trill in's satirical verse in *The Nation* registers, for the incumbent First Lady of the United States to appear as a person in her own right has been perceived, by some, as nothing less than a threat to national security:

Well, Watergate seems puny when compared

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<sup>1</sup> Hillary Rodham Clinton came to Washington and changed her name: Marilyn Quayle changed hers when she left. Back home in Indiana, where she is a partner in a law firm, Quayle has added her maiden name. The name "Marilyn Tucker Quayle" appeared on a news release issued by the firm on her appointment.

To this, the latest shocker that's been bared  
 A tempest worse by far than Teapot Dome  
 Or orgies in the final days of Rome  
 Or Black Sox games that turned out to be phony  
 Or fair Godiva starkers on her pony.  
 More shocking than the stuff they did in Sodom?  
 Yes, Hillary's gone back to using Rodham.<sup>2</sup>

I do not exaggerate. Though Trill in tries to represent this reaction as absurd, it is exactly the reaction that I keep finding in such main-stream publications as *Newsweek*, *The New York Times*, *The New Republic*, and the *International Herald Tribune*. Let's take a look.

The cover of the February 15 issue of the European edition of *Newsweek* asks in bold print, "Who's in Charge?" over a smaller print headline that reads "America's First Lady Speaks Out on the Issues." The implication is that her speaking out raises serious questions about the President and the presidency. The topic here is not "the Issues" at all, but, rather, "Hillary's Role." A third headline, printed on an attention-getting red background announces this unabashedly. The photograph on the right-hand side of the cover--*Newsweek* speaking, so to say--then both represents and responds to the supposed threat posed by Hillary Clinton and her role. She is photographed as if she were one of those dangerous female characters in a Hollywood film noir. Her face, made to look like that of a much younger woman, not even recognizable as Rodham Clinton from a few meters away, is bathed in movie light as it emerges from a black background. The lighting and framing at once glamorize, eroticize, and decontextualize her, abstracting her from the world and offering her up to our gaze as an object of contemplation. Significantly, her own gaze is oriented in the "wrong" direction--toward the left-hand side of the frame--against the grain of our "normal" left-to-right pattern of looking and reading. Furthermore, we have no idea what she is looking at, though whatever or whomever it is, she is looking down at it. Her "sinister" gaze, as well as the low-key lighting--the contrast between light and dark in the picture--lend her a sense of mystery, of unpredictability, of "wrongness," and danger, perhaps even of condescension, of illegitimate domination. But the photograph also reassures us that this threat can be overcome, mastered, contained. By employing the conventional visual language through which female figures are objectified and fetishized

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<sup>2</sup> Calvin Trillin, "The Final Shocker," *The Nation* (March 1, 1993).

on screen and in advertisements, it suggests that if only someone -perhaps *Newsweek*, if not the President- were man enough to take charge, then stability, clarity, the right order of things would be restored.

Just so you do not think I am over-reading this cover, let me compare it for a moment with the cover of *Newsweek*'s February 1, 1993 issue featuring a close-up of Bill Clinton. There we are offered an image of a man in profile, Bill Clinton, looking toward the right and slightly up. He is looking in the "right" direction, and the lighting, keyed to his skin tone, is natural. Furthermore, his face is slightly turned away from the camera and therefore difficult to see as an object, while it is set firmly on a neck that connects with a hint of shoulder and a full ear. In other words, this image neither fetishizes nor decontextualizes the face. Clinton's figure is not so much to be looked at as to be looked with. We see not only the image of Clinton looking, but the images of the people and issues he is looking at and thinking about--Saddam Hussein, Somalia, Haitian boat people, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Yeltsin. So there is no mystery here, but rather a human consciousness with whom we can identify. Our gaze masters the images of "Clinton's World" rather than the image of Clinton himself. The grid of smaller images superimposed on Clinton's face further baffles any attempt to turn the image of Clinton into an object of erotic or cognitive mastery, while it also gives that image the illusion of interiority and psychological depth.

Just under the rubric, "Clinton's World," is printed the headline, "Redefining America's Role (emphasis mine), announcing an article written by Henry Kissinger. Visually, that is, "Clinton's World," "America's Role," and Kissinger are all lined up on the same side. *Newsweek* thus equates a masterful, male gaze with the authority to "redefine." Americanness itself is strongly coded male, the different political affiliations and generations of Clinton and Kissinger serving here to give this male monopoly the appearance of inclusiveness and diversity. In fact, the notion of the American nation will not be redefined in any way but "male." Nor will the roles or categories of "male" and "female" be redefined. An alarming corollary emerges from this comparison of magazine covers. Read together, they imply that Henry Kissinger, a famous Republican, but not an elected official--a man previously associated with Richard Nixon's scandal-torn administration and also with the illegal overthrow of Salvador Allende's democratically-elected government in Chile-has every right to redefine national roles, even under a Democratic administration. Hillary Rodham Clinton, on the other hand, no more unelected than Kissinger and certainly a lot more sympathetic to the current President's politics, does not.

Before I turn to the text of the Hillary Rodham Clinton article itself, let me locate the kind of analysis I am doing here in relation to some of the feminist theoretical work upon which I am drawing. I do not suppose that the editors, layout designers, and photographers at *Newsweek* think about what they are doing in quite these terms. I suspect that they work much more instinctively. Their sense of what feels and looks right is, in turn, informed by thousands, perhaps millions, of images from advertising, cinema, and Western art traditions. Feminist film theorists, media literacy specialists, and analysts of gender in advertising try to track the political unconscious of this visual culture, somewhat as Freud unpacked dream imagery and Marx analyzed the workings of the economic relationships embedded in social class and commodity fetishism. The aim of this work of cultural criticism is to loosen the hold of these images, to make us as citizens more responsible for what we see and how we see it. For instance, I have read these magazine covers as portraits, not of Bill Clinton and Hillary Rodham Clinton, but of the corporate mentality of the publishers of *Newsweek*. I begin to have a sense of how they want me to think and feel. From there, I can begin to speculate about what interests are served and what interests are subverted or denied within this conceptual framework. I do not suppose, on the other hand, that simply changing these images will redress the political imbalance between women and men. As African American cultural theorist Henry Louis Gates has put it, "Images are part of a larger formula of social behavior, and you can't assume that they will free us if only we can control them."<sup>3</sup> Image-changing is no substitute for material political and economic change. What the cultural critic can do is alter the authority of those images, denaturalizing their appearance of self-evidence. In this way, the critic makes change thinkable, even exiting. We can open up new conceptual spaces within which human subjectivity and human interactions may be experienced differently, and within which change may therefore appear less threatening.

The text of *Newsweek's* feature article, authored by two men--Howard Fineman and Mark Miller--deserves comment first, though. The article presents a veritable handbook on how women's voices are distorted, muffled, or silenced in the U.S. mass media. It also displays a fascinating instance of what I would call "male" hysteria--a loss of control by the male voice. Another photograph spread across most of the right-hand

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<sup>3</sup> Gates offers this formulation in the documentary film *Color Adjustment*, a history of the presentation of African Americans on U.S. television, directed by Marlon Riggs and broadcast on PBS in 1991 .

page and half of the left sets up the rather complicated frame of this piece. Hillary Rodham Clinton strides along "The corridors of power" with a Senator, George Mitchell.<sup>4</sup> The relationship between the two figures, both dressed tastefully in black suits, both about the same height, both shot from a low angle and lit the same, would be unremarkable were it not for the eyes of two women in the background leering at them from behind their backs. The gaze of these figures sets up a strange spectatorial politics. Giving us what in film would be called a reaction shot, the images of the two women suggest first that the unremarkable image of Rodham Clinton and Mitchell be regarded as remarkable, unusual, startling. Further, because these gazes are voyeuristic--the two women appear to see the supposedly powerful couple without themselves being seen--they undercut or denaturalize the authority of the foreground image. The strategy I was suggesting a moment ago as a method available to the feminist cultural critic is being used here by the photographer to problematize the normality of a man and a woman discussing matters of state on an equal footing. The corridors of power take on a mysterious ambience. A sense of conspiracy and intrigue, of something precarious, hidden, probably illicit insinuates itself. What is different about this use of the strategy of denaturalization is the political relationship it sets up between image and spectator. Rather than empowering the spectator as an interpreter, this photo induces a certain queasiness. The voyeuristic gaze of the background couple eroticizes and "feminizes" the Capitol Hill couple, but violates decorum by being itself identified as female rather than male. We, the spectators, are also "feminized" insofar as we accept the photograph's invitation to look through the eyes of the voyeurs. The net effect of this triple "feminization" is not to call the authority of the masterful "male" gaze into question, but rather to refuse the viewer any access to it, leaving him--or her--feeling uneasy, powerless. The rug has not been unraveled but simply pulled out from under the viewer's feet.

The intentions of these visual strategies, however conscious or unconscious, are more than confirmed in the accompanying text in which ten paragraphs out of nineteen are devoted to developing a plot line lifted from a grade B movie. Here are a few of its most egregious moments. This supposed news story about an independent woman, with her own career, opens not on Hillary Rodham Clinton, but on her husband, who is presented--as if he were Humphrey Bogart in *The Big Sleep* or *The Maltese Falcon*--as having just been presented with a problem. A problem that takes the shape of a woman.

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<sup>4</sup> This and all further quotations are taken from Fineman's and Miller's article, "Hillary's Role," *Newsweek* (February 15, 1993): 28-33.

Or rather several women, including his own wife and two Hillary surrogates. Judge Kimba Wood, a potential nominee for Attorney General, has just been asked if she has "a Zoe Baird problem." Zoe Baird, Bill Clinton's first nominee for the position of Attorney General, was asked to withdraw her name when it was discovered that she had illegally employed undocumented immigrants to look after her children, violating tax laws as well as immigration laws when she also failed to pay their social security taxes. Kimba Wood, though denying she had, or represented, such a problem, was also later dropped from consideration because she had once employed an undocumented Trinidadian to look after her children, even though it was still legal when she did so, and she scrupulously pay Ed all the required taxes. Our authors proceed from the scene in which they portray a supposedly devious Wood more or less lying to the President to a conspiratorial scene between Wood and the President's wife, whose own political network is blamed for both Baird's and Wood's abortive candidacies. Literally nothing is said about the professional achievements of either woman, while both they--and by extension their patron--are obsessively linked with "illegal aliens, a particularly xenophobic term for undocumented immigrants to which every human rights organization in the U.S. has strenuously objected. The message, by the end of act one, then, is that "the White House looks horrible," as an anonymous Democratic senator is supposed to have said, and Hillary Rodham Clinton is to blame (not the lack of family support services in the U.S. and/or the unequal division of parental responsibility between male and female, let along U.S. foreign policy in the Caribbean or U.S. immigration regulations).

In the second act the plot thickens, the ante is upped. Still following the paradigm of the B-movie script, the article segues from the problem of women deceiving the President and trying to rot the moral fiber of the judiciary system to the problem of woman, already coded as corrupt, trying to seize illegitimate control over the country itself. Something strange and weird and "entirely new" is going on, "whose consequences are unknown," *Newsweek* warns. Hillary Clinton has "unprecedented clout." Her aides outrank those of the Vice President. Though for the moment, "she knows the limits," the specter of usurpation (figuratively coupled with alien invasion) haunts the presidency, her "unique role" as adviser and presidential appointee raising the question, "who's really in charge in the Oval Office?". To get some idea of the weirdness and misogyny of this plot, one need only recall the different perturbation caused by John F. Kennedy's appointment of his brother Robert to the office of attorney General or by their close association in the Oval Office. There were charges of nepotism, certainly, but no sense that one brother threatened the power of the other. And what of Oliver North's power to wage wars never

declared, or even known about, by the U.S. Congress? North's actions have been construed alternatively as either patriotic or criminal, but rarely if ever as usurpative. Visually, during the Congressional hearings, the press tended to make him analogous to the Jimmy Stewart character in Frank Capra's classic film, "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington".

The reader who forges on beyond these five paragraphs of B-movie scriptwriting will then find eight paragraphs of more or less unexceptionable reportage about Hillary Rodham Clinton's work, associates, and politics, which, by the way, completely contradict the Hillary-as-problem plot, though no notice is taken of this incoherence. She is given credit for making several important decisions during the campaign, for being very good at talking to Congress people, and for being a generally excellent team-mate for her husband. And, of course, she also gets along with women's groups.

In what might seem the "non sequitur" of the century, Hillary Clinton is no sooner characterized as "someone we can talk to and count on" by the chair of the National Women's Political Caucus than our abruptly hysterical authors put her in the same category with Britain's young, politically inexperienced, remote, and supposedly unstable Princess Diana. I can only suppose that the prospect of women working successfully with women precipitates this bizarre reference to a famous female victim of power, with whose pathos they evidently feel more comfortable. "She now outpulls Princess Di as a newsstand draw for *People* magazine," they write, irritably implying in the same breath that Rodham Clinton benefits illegitimately and disproportionately from the team strategy she and her husband have used for many years (whereas just the opposite--the disproportionate advantage that partnership with Hillary Rodham Clinton has given to Bill Clinton's career--would seem as obvious an inference to be drawn). Comparing Hillary Rodham Clinton's popularity with Princess Diana's serves the double purpose of re-eroticizing Hillary Clinton's image and hinting anew that her energies and goals are necessarily in conflict with her husband's. Clinton aides are said to be "nervous" about it: Republicans come right out and say that Hillary's prominence will undermine her husband's authority, causing Americans (all of whom are evidently assumed to be male or male-identified) to see an "unaccountable power hovering outside the Oval Office."

The stage is thus set for the last act of the B-Movie, whose misogynistic plotting returns in full force, Zoe Baird, Kimba Wood, and their illegal alien buddies are back. The fundamental order of things once again hangs in the balance. We wait in suspense to see what the President will do. (Remember, this is supposed to be an article about



Hillary Clinton!) Wood, who, you recall, has committed no crime except combining motherhood with a legal career, becomes the figure in relation to which the presidency of the United States will be both threatened and reaffirmed. As *Newsweek* tells the story, her female treachery is uncovered "just in the nick of time." The President then acts unilaterally (that is, consulting only male advisers) and decisively not to nominate her. The text concludes, "And Hillary was not in the room." The presidency and national security are saved. Hillary's role, it seems, is to be absent.

Frankly I was having trouble believing my own eyes and brain as I wrote the preceding pages. A friend, Susan Ingleby, a doctoral candidate in organizational behavior at Cornell University asked what the paper was about, though, so I said, a little tentatively, "It looks to me as if *Newsweek* sees Hillary Rodham Clinton as a threat to national security who hangs out with alien saboteurs and wants somehow to damage her husband or the presidency or both." "Oh, yes, n she said, "with a scholarly gleam in her eye, "this has been documented. The Pentagon awarded women bidders only six tenths of one percent of all purchases over \$10,000 from their annual budget of two hundred billion dollars, because, as the head of procurement for the Department of Defense told one business woman, 'Women entrepreneurs are a threat to national security.'<sup>5</sup> Susan elaborated, "In the corporate world managerial women are leaving their jobs in droves. Ten out of eleven women who enter male dominated occupations leave their jobs, apparently because they are frustrated by the lack of recognition and advancement and by the outright negativity they encounter in these so-called integrated companies. As of 1990, 80% of promotion ladders were, in fact, segregated by sex." Running athwart both governmental and corporate practices, she explained further, there is vastly unequal protection for women's property rights. whether that property is construed as intellectual--as the ideas women put forward in meetings, memos, and the like--or as physical--as the body with which she lives, works, and may bear and raise children. The recent murder of a Family Planning doctor in Florida is an indicative, if extreme, expression of the mentality still embedded in many statutes that believes women should

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<sup>5</sup> This comment was reported in the Hearings of the Committee on Small Business, U.S. House of Representatives, One Hundredth Congress, Second Session, 1988. I quote it from Susan Ingleby's manuscript essay, "Factors Leading to Higher Rates of Female Entrepreneurship" (1990) where she cites as her source *New Economic Realities: The Role of Women Entrepreneurs*. U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. Serial No. 100-53.

not have the right to determine their own reproductive lives, let alone the rights to their money-making ideas. One can add to these examples such apparently disparate circumstances as the lack of paid maternity leave, of child care, and of other kinds of support for parenting, a disproportionate amount of which falls on the shoulders of women. And, for another example, the exclusion of women patients from clinical trials of medical treatments. It does not take many of these considerations to begin to appreciate the greater financial, emotional, and physical riskiness--or what experts in Ingleby's field call the "greater transaction costs"--of operating from a woman's position at work and at home in the U.S.

I would like to push this strange juxtaposition of national security with women's property rights one step further. "Raping Women as a Military Strategy" reads the headline in the February 18-24, 1993 *Budapest Week*. "Are the Serbian rape camps a crime against women or against nations?" "Is nationalism a crime against women?" might have been a more illuminating way of putting the question. Strategic rapists on whatever side in a military conflict seem to concur with *Newsweek* and the Pentagon that women present a national security risk simply by being women. The violation of women's bodies as a weapon of war makes sense only if nationhood and national identity are seen as fundamentally "masculines and what some American theorists term "heterosexist." That is to say, the idea of nation and the component of personal identity that is derived from identification with such a nation are mapped onto a concept of gender that opposes male to female and insists that the former be the dominant, positive term, the latter a subordinate, negative term, in this binary opposition. Analogously, one's own nation is male, good, right true, while the nations in relation to which it defines itself as such are, or must be proved to be, negative, devious, dangerous, appetitive, illegitimate, feminine. The two maps, the two sets of emotions, statutes, and customs, mirror and reinforce each other. In Bosnia-Herzegovina we can see, if we are willing to, the ultimate consequences of this pattern of national and "personal" self-definition.

Which, by the way, is by no means confined to men, nor are men biologically confined to this construction of their identity. In the March 29 issue of *Newsweek*, female reporter Eleanor Clift earnestly reprises the B-movie, Hillary as potentially national--security-threatening "femme fatale" scenario. Clift's article begins by quoting a charge made by a Senator (Charles Grassley) that Hillary Rodham Clinton's health task force is "a dangerously secretive 'shadow government.'" The article proceeds to give a generally positive report on what Rodham Clinton is actually doing. But it concludes with a stunningly militaristic return of the national security motif. "She has managed to conduct

most of her business beneath the media radar," Clift writes, as if Hillary Rodham Clinton were a stealth bomber or some relic of the Cold War Strategic Air Command era. Clift then reassures us--she supposes--that, after all, this is not Armageddon. Hillary Rodham Clinton will not take or get credit for her creativity, intelligence, and hard work after all. Rather, "Once the plan is introduced, Hillary will let her husband take over as the main salesperson. 'You'll never see a joint address.' . . . It will be his health-care plan, for better or for worse."

Meanwhile, none other than the President of the United States himself obviously construes his own masculinity, the nation, national security, and the relations between women and men citizens in a civil society within a very different frame. It is to this change of frame--with which the media has obviously not caught up--that I think we should direct our attention in assessing the Hillary Rodham Clinton phenomenon. A change that will not cost the U.S. taxpayer one red cent, this mental, emotional, psychological, philosophical reframing could be one of the most significant events of the United States's twentieth century.

Though another heckler, Mickey Kauss in *The New Republic* of February 15, 1993, complains that "her views are largely unknown" (6), Hillary Rodham Clinton does speak frequently and eloquently. Her views are also voluminously available in her many publications. What she says repeatedly, in actions as well as words, is "We're all in this together" (*Newsweek*, February 15, 1993). That is, she is putting forth a decidedly different concept of identity, community, and their relation to power. She seems to have a profound and mobilizing intuition that no one is empowered by the disempowerment of others, whether the issue be the environment, the economy, education, or health care. A presidency that could be threatened by her vision and ambition would, most likely, not be a presidency she would be interested in having.

The question I will leave you with today is how deeply and how widely this reframing and restructuring of power at its very base, in national and gender identity formation, will--or already has--taken hold, and how far it may ramify. What the press does not say, for obvious reasons, is that Hillary Rodham Clinton is not a lone phenomenon, There are thousands of women like her--if less publicly so--and millions more whose ideas and activism have made her emergence possible. I look forward to participating with you in the further unfolding of this epochal development. And I thank you for the opportunity to add my voice to those of all the other women speaking out at this exciting moment.