Media Rhetoric of Human Rights©

Dr Caryn Coatney
School of Arts and Communication
University of Southern Queensland
Springfield, Queensland, Australia

Abstract— **This unique case study reveals journalists' roles in portraying the rhetoric of United States President Barack Obama and Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard as they signaled an end to their military alliance in Afghanistan from 2010 to 2013.**

Keywords- journalism; rhetoric; Barack Obama; Julia Gillard

I. INTRODUCTION

The first African-American President, Barack Obama, and Australia's first female Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, cultivated media rhetoric to signify compassionate leadership as they aimed to end their nations' longest international conflict. Their benevolent language masked the reorientation of their foreign policies from Afghanistan towards other Asia-Pacific nations during their alliance from 2010 to 2013. Yet there is a gap in the research on both leaders' rhetorical appeals to human rights, particularly pertaining to the rights of women and girls, as they strengthened their alliance. The purpose of this case study is to discover how journalists investigated their rhetoric and managed multiple sources about the conflict for expanding news audiences [1].

This journalism analysis draws upon scholar Peter Drucker's definition of managers. Drucker writes, "the first criterion in identifying those people within an organization who have management responsibility is not command over people. It is *responsibility for contribution*" [2]. According to Drucker, managers enable people to perform and achieve. Media researchers have identified journalists as ever-more responsible for managing the symbolic news arena to involve audiences in interactive discussions [3]. This study contributes to research on journalism's role in managing diverse perspectives, voices and images within news communities.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Researchers have focused on the U.S. Democratic President's ability to develop engaging rhetoric signifying a desire to work with communities in Muslim-majority countries. Forsythe, Wing, and Nadimi found that Obama's multilateral, multicultural rhetoric showed his concern for Afghanistan civilians during a shift in foreign policy towards other Asia-Pacific countries. Etzioni argued that he limited America's role in Afghanistan to fighting terrorism, rather than promoting democracy. According to Forsythe, Obama's team did not speak with a unified voice as the U.S. Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, suggested a long-term commitment to Afghanistan women from 2009 to 2013. Furthermore, Cortright noted that Obama's administration increasingly used women's rights as the rationale behind the intervention. Hu, Khan, McBride and Wibben discussed the administration's reframing of the intervention as a humanitarian mission that at times overlooked Afghanistan women's initiatives [4]. This is the first study of Obama's human rights rhetoric as he delivered his "anchor speech" on the U.S. role in the Asia-Pacific during his first presidential visit to Australia in 2011 [5].

There has also been a lack of scholarly literature on Gillard's rhetoric about the U.S.-Australian alliance in Afghanistan. Cameron and McKenzie found that she developed more humane rhetoric about Afghanistan asylum seekers as an Australian Labor Party Prime Minister. Johnson argued that Gillard promoted media images to indicate her empathy for asylum seekers' children. Donaghue identified that some journalists expected a "gentler" leadership style from a woman [6]. According to biographer Kent, Gillard dismissed the view as "nonsense" that women politicians would create a "more caring and sharing environment" [7]. Ferguson, Drum, and Oakes suggest she became adept in using vivid language for broadcast and social media [8]. This article reveals Gillard's rhetorical techniques to appear as a symbolically benevolent, matriarchal figure in the media.

Several journalism scholars have found the conflict generated more investigative reporting of the rhetoric about a humanitarian intervention. King noted a gradual shift in the post-9/11 media preference for visually immediate, dramatized, and personalized stories of overcoming chaos. Journalists increasingly reported event-driven information contradicting official interpretations. Fahmy identified a changing trend in AP images of post-Taliban society, with more depictions of Afghanistan women in active roles symbolically equal to the viewer. Furthermore, Ryder emphasized that Pakistan girl Malala Yousafzai's BBC blog shared insights into a non-violent approach towards educating Taliban affiliates. Ottosen showed that a Norwegian journalist's coverage of Afghanistan civilian casualties led to a public debate in the media about the military intervention [9]. This study shows the journalists' managerial role in portraying multi-sourced news of the conflict.

III. MULTIMETHOD APPROACH

For this purpose, this study has analyzed a selected sample of the speeches of Obama and Gillard. A multimethod approach was selected to analyze the news coverage of the leaders' speeches, including a rhetorical approach, semiotics-based analysis, and content analysis. The rhetorical analysis has focused on their keywords about their nations' role in the conflict, particularly their portrayal of human rights, women, "progress", an international "partnership", and Afghanistan.

With this aim, this study has made a comparison of 7 of Obama's international speeches; he delivered these in Ankara, Turkey, in Cairo, Egypt, and in Australia during his first presidential visit to Canberra and Darwin in 2011 [10]. A comparative analysis was made between his international speeches and two of his major addresses about the conflict for U.S. audiences: his address at West Point in 2009, and his announcement in 2011 of a troop withdrawal from Afghanistan [11]. The selected sample also includes 14 of Gillard's speeches pertaining to the alliance and conflict in Afghanistan. The sample includes: her speeches during her first prime minister's trip overseas, and her opening and closing of the first parliamentary debate on Australia's involvement in the conflict; her address to the U.S. Congress; her speeches with Obama; her remarks at national and international events; and her announcement in 2012 of an Australian military withdrawal from Afghanistan [12].

Therefore, this study identifies central rhetorical elements of the leaders' speeches. These elements relate to: their media ethos or image, how they established their credibility to audiences; their use of pathos to stir emotions; and their development of logos, or appealing to persuasive logic. As part of this rhetorical analysis, the paper uses semiotic methods to analyze the visual images in the news coverage of their speeches. Semiotics explores the elements of images to reveal the relations between the visual messages, their producers and audiences. A limited content analysis is made of the two leaders' keywords in 11 news outlets from 2010 to 2016 (*Age*, Atlantic Wire, Australian Broadcasting Corporation, or ABC, *Australian*, Buzzfeed, *Australian Financial Review*, *Canberra Times*, *New York Times*, *Sunday Mirror*, *Sydney Morning Herald*, *Wall Street Journal*). This analysis includes Obama's off-camera news briefings about his visit to Australia in 2011, Gillard's interviews with journalist Sir David Frost and the ABC, and her news conference on the military withdrawal from Afghanistan [13]. Moreover, this study compares the two leaders' public images with their administrations' private correspondence to U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton from 2010 to 2013. The U.S. State Department began releasing Clinton's emails in 2015 [14]. This multimethod approach will identify how journalists presented the rhetoric of Obama and Gillard to news audiences.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A.   Obama's Rhetoric of "Political Equals"

During the president's visit to Australia, Obama emphasized more inclusive language to signify a strengthened alliance for bolstering human rights in 2011. Behind the scenes, the deputy national security advisor for strategic communications, Ben Rhodes, briefed journalists about the planned military drawdown in Afghanistan to expand the U.S. role in Asia. At the White House, Rhodes confided to journalists during an off-the-camera briefing that "our ability to work cooperatively and to lead in Asia Pacific is going to be essential in our ability to remain a world leader". He explained that Obama would deliver an "anchor speech … on how the U.S. sees the Asia Pacific" as well as "to strengthen

our core alliances" [15]. In the Federal Parliament House in Canberra, Rhodes briefed journalists that Obama's speech would include a focus on "advancing the rights of women and minorities and indigenous cultures" [16]. Obama developed an egalitarian media image by referring to his childhood visits to Australia and emphasizing personal pronouns that signified his language of unity. For example, he remarked to Australian journalists: "We are bound by common ideals, the rights and the freedoms that we cherish" [17] His words accentuated his media ethos that he identified with journalists' values. The off-the-record briefings indicated journalists' ability to influence the media portrayal of the president; they lobbied for Obama to talk with U.S. marines as well as Australian service members during his speech on an expanded military base in Darwin [18].

Obama's central emphasis of human rights contrasted with his previous speeches about the conflict in Afghanistan. He avoided using the term, human rights, when addressing the Turkish parliament, but spoke of his administration's support of "opportunity and the promise of a better life" for people in Afghanistan and Pakistan [19]. In Cairo, he stated that women's rights was the sixth issue of his speech: "That is why the United States will partner with any Muslim-majority country to support expanded literacy for girls, and to help young women pursue employment through micro-financing that helps people live their dreams" [20].

When Obama addressed the parliament in Canberra, he referred to the pathos of an emotional bond between Americans and Australians:

> The bonds between us run deep. In each other's story we see so much of ourselves. Ancestors who crossed vast oceans – some by choice, some in chains … And we are citizens who live by a common creed – no matter who you are, no matter what you look like, everyone deserves a fair chance; everyone deserves a fair go [21].

His use of the literary device of an anthesis, contrasting "some by choice, some in chains," and the form of an epistrophe, with the closing repetition of "fair," signified his affinity with Australian ideals. Furthermore, he linked the alliance with a global struggle for women's rights. His speech neatly shifted over historic events:

> It's why women in this country demanded that their voices be heard, making Australia the first nation to let women vote and run for parliament and, one day, become prime minister ... It's why a soldier in a watch tower along the DMZ [demilitarized zone] defends a free people in the South, and why a man from the North risks his life to escape across the border. Why soldiers in blue helmets keep the peace in a new nation. And why women of courage go into the brothels to save young girls from modern-day slavery, which must come to an end [22].

He developed the rhetorical device of an anaphora by repeating his opening declaration, "it's why", to indicate his rhetorical logos, or rationale, for strengthening the alliance on the basis of human rights. His sweeping narrative magnified Australia's role while glossing over New Zealand's achievement as the first nation to extend the vote to women.

Many journalists accentuated the symbolism of Obama's egalitarian tone, open hand gestures and relaxed image during his visit to Australia. Later, an *Age* correspondent noticed the congenial relations between Obama and Gillard at the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation forum; "her rapport with Barack Obama was palpable; their easy banter and open body language made them seem political equals" [23]. An *Australian* journalist remarked on Obama's ability to signify an egalitarian persona during Gillard's visit to The White House in March 2011; "he looked relaxed, hands in pockets and repeatedly showing his winning smile" [24]. Some reporters remarked on Obama's skills in delivering good-humored talks to American and Australian service personnel, as well as to parliamentarians during an official dinner. They publicized these informal messages on online and social media by labelling these as "political theatre" that cast the president in the role of "entertainer-in-chief" [25]. The *Wall Street Journal* opined that Obama was "hitting higher notes," compared to his first presidential visit to Asia in 2009 [26]. He remained popular in Australia; and journalists reported that his visit boosted Gillard's public approval rating [27].

Afterwards, more news articles delved beyond the light-hearted rhetoric of equal allies. A *Wall Street Journal* commentator remarked on Obama's ability to strengthen the U.S. role in Asia. Clinton's deputy chief of staff, Jake Sullivan, emailed a copy of the article to the Secretary of State. The commentator opined that "as countries deepen their part in the global system, they become increasingly dependent on it" [28]. Sullivan described the article as "[a] good piece on more US influence in Asia" [29]. The *Wall Street Journal* also developed a searchable database for viewing Clinton's emails after the U.S. State Department released these to the public [30]. An *Australian* journalist published excerpts of an email from assistant secretary of state Kurt Campbell to Clinton several months before the presidential trip. According to Campbell, the Australian defence minister, Stephen Smith, urged the U.S. administration not to cancel the visit. Campbell advised Clinton that Smith said the Australian government "would arrange whatever fit the White House's needs, even buying more from us if needed" because a cancelled presidential visit would be "disastrous" [31]. The reporter suggested that the Australian government considered buying more military aircraft to secure Obama's visit [32]. The news analysis showed investigative journalists' management of resources to share insights into the alliance.

B.   *Gillard's Benevolent, Matriarchal Rhetoric*

Similarly to the media portrayal of Obama, Gillard generated online news reports of an unusually informal leadership during her first prime ministerial overseas trip that began with a visit to southern Afghanistan in 2010. As she recalled in her autobiography, *My Story*, she attempted to signify "a sense of compassion" to mask the "artificiality" of her visit to the military base in Tarin Kot, the capital of Uruzgan [33]. Videocast news images portrayed her in egalitarian scenes as a young soldier attempted to persuade her to wear his homemade football jumper. Since her trip coincided with the annual Australian Rules football match, she joked with him by asking, "is this regulation?" and adding,

"you're a shocker" [34]. Several days later, she admitted in a televised interview: "I'm just going to be really upfront about this: foreign policy is not my passion … if I had a choice I'd probably more be in a school watching kids learn to read in Australia" [35]. Commentators opined that her comment was refreshingly candid, but she had blundered by seeming "ever anxious to appear in tune with the perspectives of 'working families'" more concerned about education than foreign policy [36]. She explained the rationale, or logos, behind her prime ministership to British journalist Sir David Frost in February 2011: "I got into politics, public life, fuelled by an ambition that every child should get a great education." She smiled and nodded while emphasizing the words, "every child" and "great education" to signify her ideals. Towards the end of the interview, she adopted a schoolteacher's tone to chide Frost for mentioning England's cricket victory over Australia the previous month. Feigning a stern expression by looking slightly down at him, she remarked, "Now you're just being naughty. We'll get you back" [37]. Gillard involved journalists in media co-production to portray her ethos as a symbolically benevolent matriarchal figure.

The semblance of an education-oriented prime ministership masked the Australian government's shift in rhetoric about the rationale behind the intervention in Afghanistan. Differing from Obama's cautious rhetoric, Gillard increasingly extended Australia's rationale from a mission of combating terrorism to a duty to help Afghanistan women and girls. For example, she referred to a need to protect their educational opportunities during Australia's first parliamentary debate on the conflict. In a conversational style, she remarked: "Nothing better symbolises the fall of the Taliban than these two million Afghan girls learning to read" [38]. Her speeches signified a sense of devotion by emphasizing, "Australia will not abandon Afghanistan;" however, her optimism simplified the problem of rural illiteracy [39]. Continuing her anecdotal evidence, she spoke of Malaysian female doctors working with local women in Afghanistan to improve healthcare [40]. Her parliamentary argument portrayed more diverse female roles than the media depiction of brutalized victims [41]. This approach was consistent with U.S. State Department policy. A year earlier, Clinton advised three Afghanistan women politicians at the State Department: "We will not abandon you. We will stand with you always" [42]. The department's ambassador at large for global women's issues, Melanie Verveer, also wrote in a *Foreign Policy* issue of the need to present more Afghanistan women as leaders in their communities [43].

Gillard increasingly worked with Obama's team as she expanded her protective rhetoric about Afghanistan [44]. She adopted a personal tone to invoke the pathos of military heroism by recounting on Australia Day: "In Afghanistan, I've met Australian soldiers, and I've seen Australian strength and compassion. As our diggers [soldiers] risk everything they have, to deny terrorism a safe haven, while protecting the weak and allowing little girls to learn to read" [45]. Moreover, she developed her ethos of benevolence in a speech during the inaugural International Day of the Girl Child:

> … we must [do] all we can to alleviate the suffering of women and increase their rights and opportunities

globally, especially here in our region. Nothing is more important than education. I don't want to see young girls working in sweatshops. I want to see them in the classroom [46].

Behind the scenes, Verveer emailed Clinton, "I think women's development issues are an ideal way to further our interests and engagement" [47]. Verveer also noted that Gillard planned "a huge Aussie gender commitment" at the Pacific Islands Forum in 2012 [48]. Gillard continued to extend the rationale behind Australia's foreign policy during her address to the UN general assembly: "This is a principle underpinning every Australian aid intervention and initiative: empowering women and girls" [49]. She also spoke of her "personal commitment" to prioritize female education as the co-chair of the UN Secretary-General's millennium development goals advocacy group [50]. Clinton, Gillard, and Verveer suggested a long-term commitment to Afghanistan women that contrasted with Obama's approach.

C.   *Journalists' Roles in News Communities*

Journalists increasingly experimented with the relatively new media to present more nuanced views of the conflict. According to the UN Dispatch, reporters began using Twitter to crowdsource information about Kabul in 2008 [51]. For example, the Atlantic Wire's Uri Friedman explained that correspondents preferred to report Kabul-based explosions on Twitter because of the rapid ability to source eyewitnesses, check facts and form networks with other reporters [52]. A *New York Times* blog editor, Robert Mackey, identified that journalists used Twitter to circumvent the Afghanistan government's ban on live television reporting of explosions. Mackey quoted local journalists' "robust coverage" of the attacks on Twitter because it provided more independent information than the exaggerated claims on the Taliban-backed website [53]. In Australia, the ABC used Twitter to develop a crowdsourcing project about public views of the country's first parliamentary debate on the conflict. The Twitterfeed indicated more than twice of the unique users favored an Australian withdrawal from Afghanistan. The ABC published a selected range of tweets reflecting a similar level of public opposition. The selected tweets were based on public views of Australia's "responsibility" towards Afghanistan civilians. The ABC chose not to publish any critical tweets about the alliance in its report [54]. Several months earlier, the ABC conducted a similar project on its youth website that indicated about an even amount of online users both favored and opposed the military role in Afghanistan [55]. The journalists' expanded use of relatively new media showed their ability to manage multiple perspectives of the conflict, although they did not challenge the need for the alliance.

During the expanding public debate, online journalists increasingly portrayed varying Afghanistan perspectives, voices, and images of women's roles. More interviewers spoke to Afghanistan sources who provided different insights from the official versions. For example, the *New York Times* and related mobile app, the *Wall Street Journal* and Australia's ABC podcasts circulated interviews with Afghanistan women's rights activists including Malalai Joya, Suraya Pakzad, and Sima Samar. More journalists recognized local women's achievements in operating secret schools during the Taliban reign as well as their efforts to lobby for more independent female politicians, and improve educational opportunities for rural women [56]. The interviews presented a wider range of views about local women's experiences including Joya's criticism that the official optimism was "putting dust in the eyes of the people around the world" and Samar's comment that: "More and more women now have access to education and positions of power and are trying to influence policy" [57]. With the expansion of news critiques, journalists began to encourage British soldiers to upload their unedited images to Twitter [58]. Many images focused on the effects of the conflict on Afghanistan children, and included an army photographer's tweet: "A good photograph is one that makes you think" [59]. A soldier described the children as the "innocents of the conflict" while a former airman portrayed a group of boys reading together and tweeted: "Knowledge is power and this is the only way forward in Afghanistan" [60]. More news outlets delved beyond the military images of servicewomen assisting Afghanistan women; a *New York Times* slideshow referred to cultural differences between the groups, and photojournalism shifted towards the portrayal of independent local activists [61].

Obama and Gillard spoke of greater opportunities for Afghanistan girls when they announced a military withdrawal from the conflict. Developing language of inclusivity, Obama focused on: "What we can do, and will do, is build a partnership with the Afghan people that endures." He continued to limit the partnership's objectives to fighting terrorism and supporting an independent government while giving tribute to local achievements:

> In the face of violence and intimidation, Afghans are fighting and dying for their country, establishing local police forces, opening markets and schools, creating new opportunities for women and girls, and trying to turn the page on decades of war [62].

Contrasting with Gillard's idealist speeches, she used a measured tone that resembled Obama's rhetoric as she spoke of "Australia's enduring partnership with Afghanistan in development." Her announcement differed from her rhetoric focusing on a long-term commitment to Afghanistan women's prosperity [63]. Some reporters questioned Gillard about the purported gains in education and political leadership in Afghanistan. During the interviews, Gillard distanced her government from being responsible for the initiatives, saying in 2010: "Ultimately, that has to become the work of the Afghan people and Afghan nation." Two years later, she reaffirmed a cautious tone at a news conference after she announced the military withdrawal: "We can continue to assist in that development work and we will, but ultimately continuing Afghanistan's development will be the work of the Afghan Government and the Afghan people" [64]. More investigative features uncovered problems in the allied-sponsored schools in Afghanistan that included a shortage of qualified administrators, educators, and building maintenance teams. Journalists increasingly managed the news to question the rhetoric of human rights, opening more debates on the success of the humanitarian projects [65].

V. CONCLUSION

Obama and Gillard generated the media portrayal of their benevolent leaderships when they signified a sense of affinity for protecting the rights of women and girls in conflict zones. Furthermore, Gillard cooperated with Obama's team, including Clinton, to extend the rhetorical rationale for the conflict on the basis of improving educational opportunities for Afghanistan girls. Journalists' management of expanding news networks contributed to involving independent sources, challenging the protective, matriarchal rhetoric by portraying more Afghanistan women as independent leaders in their communities. Although limited, the investigative reporting exposed some flaws in the official optimistic versions about the military intervention's achievements.

Likewise, journalists' management of online resources brought multiple perspectives about the media rhetoric of a strengthened U.S.-Australian alliance based on upholding human rights. More journalists delved beyond the egalitarian rhetoric to question the Australian government's apparent eagerness to win Obama's favor. As journalists expanded public debates on the conflict in Afghanistan, they managed the news to avoid questioning the underlying rationale of the alliance. This type of reporting indicates a need for journalistic enquiries that explore the meaning of a leader's seemingly compassionate rhetoric about a global conflict.

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Author Profile

Dr. Caryn Coatney is a Lecturer (Journalism) at the University of Southern Queensland. She has won global research awards. Her latest book is titled, *John Curtin: How He Won Over the Media* (Australian Scholarly Publishing). She has been an investigative journalist in Australia and internationally and worked in many fields of communication since 1990. Also she completed a Fellowship at the Australian Prime Ministers Centre in the Museum of Australian Democracy at Old Parliament House, Canberra. She has a PhD (Journalism and History), Master of Arts (Research – Journalism), and Bachelor of Arts with Double Honors (Literature and History).