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Feminist Peace and Conflict Theory

The genealogy of feminist peace and conflict theory – naturally – comes as a hybrid phenomenon. Feminist peace and conflict theory (FPCT) is nurtured by a variety of disciplines and methodologies. As is symptomatic for feminist studies, the questioning of normative standards is grounded in women's epistemology.

The silencing of women's experience and knowledge is discussed in all FPCTs. However the consequences of this silencing and the possible solutions for a change is largely divided in an understanding of essentialist 'female nature' and a construction based understanding of gender as a discursive practice.

For a feminist theory on peace the analysis of war and conflict is essential.

The variety of approaches range from historical accounts of women in war to the psychological scrutinizing of gendered upbringing of children.

Critical writings by women in liberation movements in Latin America, Africa and Asia as well as the critique on western feminism by working class, Black and lesbian scholars has further shaped the discussion.

Feminist Peace and Conflict Theory reflects on the need of visibility of women in conflicts and has led to a broader understanding of security issues. FPCT introduced the interconnectedness of all forms of violence: domestic, societal, state based and inter-state and its gendered dimension. It critically discussed the collaboration of the 'Beautiful Soul' (Jean Bethke Elshtain, 1987) in the machinery of violence.

The slogan of the Western nineteen-sixties' women's movement: 'The personal is political' can still be seen as the common ground for FPCT to transform normative legitimization of the use of violence.

GENEALOGY OF FEMINIST PEACE AND CONFLICT THEORIES

The early twenty-first-century historic reference to pacifist movements and gender aspects claimed by feminists, relate mainly to the two world wars. Yet feminists questioned earlier the gender dynamics of the French Revolution (Mary Wollstonecraft, 1792) and the exclusion of women from the acclaimed new status of citizenship. Pacifists such as Bertha von Suttner or Revolutionaries, like Rosa Luxemburg or Emma Goldman made explicit reference to the plight of women in war and the continuity of private and public tyranny; men's domination in the family and in the public domain. The continuum of violence running from domestic violence to war is therefore an essential paradigm for FPCT.

For the first time the realities encountered by women in wars — were brought to the surface, written about and taken into consideration. For the pacifist struggle the visibility of those who suffered innocently was a moral mobilising factor against war; for patriotic suffragists, images of women in war enabled them to mobilize more capacities for a just war or revolution. However, both movements argued the plight of the innocent, those suffering under the hands of the enemy or the war in general. Through the paradigmatic shift from the architects to the victims of war FPCT had a tremendous impact.

The suffragist movement in the beginning of the twentieth century - such as the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), its forerunner the Woman's Peace Party (WPP) was founded in 1915 – was divided on the line of argument that still prevails in feminist peace and conflict theory in the early twenty-first century: The split between patriotism and pacifism.

For the patriotic faction, the argument was based on participation and decision making, similar to the position taken by liberal feminists on the question of women in the army. For feminist pacifists, women had a vital contribution to make for peace. In both camps women, rather than gender, became the decisive category for both analysis as well as offering a possible solution.

The moral argument of men as makers of war and women as victims of war was the dominant analysis in FPCT until the late nineteen-eighties.

'Her-story', a feminist coinage from the early nineteen-seventies stressed the absence of women from 'His-story' in conventional historiography.

A biological versus a socially constructed concept of gender is still indicative in one division of FPCT. For essentialist feminists who argue on the basis of inherent peacefulness of women enacted by motherhood and caring, war is not only affecting women disproportionately, it is the ultimate attack on 'feminine' non-violent ideals.

The concern for liberal and equality feminists is based on the restriction of public space by war. Betty Reardon (1985) and Carol Pateman (1988) describe the conditioning of men towards aggression and women to submission as the patriarchal contract that the legitimisation of violence and war is based on.

In the similar framework, current feminist peace and conflict theorists argue that war is exclusion from decision-making; which particularly affects women. If women are not allowed in the military they are implicitly barred from a primary institution which helps codify and constitute citizenship (Francine D'Amico, 1996). However both frameworks agree that women make a vital contribution to maintaining peace.

Patriarchal structures are of importance to FPCT. For essentialist feminists, male aggression is the main cause of war. Feminists, such as Mary Daly (1978) or activists in the Ecofeminist (Vandana Shiva, 1993) movement also argue along this chain of reasoning. However, unlike

mainstream IR theory, essentialist feminists see a potential for change by stressing the non-violent potential of 'feminine virtues' in order to create a peaceful world. For structuralist feminists, the militarised masculinity, inscribed as the founding myth of nation states, needs as well as perpetuates the construction of a gender dichotomy.

Sara Ruddick (1989) coined the notion of maternal thinking by arguing that care and 'relation based THINKING' (Carol Gilligan, 1982; Nancy Chodorow, 1978) is the main pre-condition for a more peaceful society. Caretakers, they argue, do not have value in our societies and if men would take active roles in care taking, less abstract and aggression based decisions would be made.

Simon de Beauvoir (1949) introduced a more constructed notion of gender. For Beauvoir, as an existentialist, existence preceded essence therefore gender was constructed. Women are fabricated as the 'Other'. By attributing feminine to nature, women were caught in the cycle of life and nature and were denied access to public space and political decision-making.

In the late nineteen-nineties, post-modernist or deconstructivist feminists such as Judith Butler (1990), argued further, that gender as well as any other identity is created through discursive practice. Since then, a broad variety of liberal, post-structural and anti-essentialist feminists (Linda Nicholson, 1995) argued on the assumption that, if gender is constructed, it can be de-constructed and has no prior relation to the sex of a person.

Earlier on, in the mid nineteen-eighties African-American women as well as Non-Western Feminists criticised the women's movement as well as feminist peace theory and activism in two substantial ways. For example Bell Hooks (1984), Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1991), Valentine Moghadam (1994) and others argued that 'White feminism' creates a homogenous, monolithic image of 'third world women' as victims. In doing so, white middle class western feminism was criticised as simply replicating the normative setting of the Anglo Christian male by silencing anybody conceived as the 'Other'. In addition to this essential criticism, questioning the homogenous identity of women as victims and naming western, white women as perpetrators, another ground breaking influence challenged the discourse of feminist peace and conflict theory: the narration and accounts of women who participated or fought in liberation movements and claimed their position as liberating.

The experience of female fighters in Nicaragua (Margaret Randall 1994), Africa (Stephanie Urdang 1989; Meredith Turshen 1989, Amrit Wilson 1991) Vietnam (Olivia Bennett 1995) made a deep impact in the feminist peace discourse. In the wake of acknowledging women's experiences in war, both as active fighters as well as victims, the question of inherent peacefulness and maternal thinking, were shattered. Aggression and submission as gendered adjectives conditioning men and women were reflected anew. Bloodthirsty deities (Barbara Ehrenreich, 1997), warrior queens (Fatma Mernissi, 1993), ancient goddesses and female fighters

(Jean d'Arc, Calamity Jane, Mary Reed) and the history of the Homeric as well as the Dahomehian Amazons questioned the selective history of female peacemakers.

However, the tendency even in feminist peace and conflict theory is to portray female warriors as individual exemptions, as temporary transgressors. The myth of Jeanne D'Arc could be mentioned here as one of the prime examples of male structures of power decorated with a female icon in the western context.

The Ethic of Justice versus the Ethic of Peace

Equal access to active service in the armed forces is another primary discourse that has developed in feminist peace and conflict theory. For equality feminists this meant the right for women to hold any position traditionally restricted to men. However, equality feminist theory in the field of peace and conflict theory provides at least two paths of the: 'Bringing women in' approach.

Scholars, such as Judith Hicks-Stiehm (1988) have argued for equal access for men and women in the military in order to demystify the founding myth of the military itself: masculinity and the role of the protector. Others, such as Sheila Tobias (1990) have argued on grounds of soldier-citizenship; that if first class citizenship is gained through access to military positions, women need to have equal access in order to gain full citizenship. The transformation of the military institution by the number of women joining is debated against the assumption that the institution is

constitutive of a patriarchal gender dichotomy and a patriarchal institution, the state.

For a large number of feminist conflict theorists however, women's active role in the military was not the answer to a less militarised-masculine and dichotomic society. (Wendy Chapkins, 1981; Ruth Seifert, 1999)

The dominant feminist discussions on the question of the military however were based on the assumption that the military can only function through the creation of masculinized-militarised soldiers therefore cannot be the locus for a concept of citizenship outside the soldier-citizen realm. A different view was defended by Hicks-Stiehm, arguing that experience in war would provide better access into the realm of high-level politics.

Women's experience in the military, as well as critical reflections of female fighters in liberation struggles claim the right of women to equal access to all spheres. However these accounts also show the deeply internalised and militarised masculinity of military spheres. The extensive consequences of a highly gendered soldier and fighter identity were not only felt by female fighters during the struggle, but also during the post-conflict transformation that then forced them to identify with the gender roles traditionally attributed to women.

Cynthia Enloe (1983,1989, 1999) wrote extensively on the militarised masculinity of western armies considered as a foundation for nation state building and national identity reassurance. The interwoven connectedness of nation-state building, masculine initiation into the military body, the myth of the protector and the innocent, civilian victim of war was the general

assumption on which feminist peace and conflict theories from the late nineteen-eighties on where build on. Jean Bethke-Elshtain (1987) introduced the notion of the 'Beautiful Soul' and the 'Just Warrior' as gendered concepts mutually self-perpetuating the reassurance of a national security discourse as well as the mobilization of soldiers for protection.

Maternal thinking

FPCT scholars challenged the concept of maternal thinking, constitutive for pacifist essentialist feminists. Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1996), Laura Kaplan (1994) for example deconstructed the notion of inherent peacefulness in the mother figure, claiming that without the collaboration of the mother-character, the legitimization of violence enacted by men, could not function. Mothering and caring was questioned, the collaboration of the caretakers with the military cause came into discussion. Sacrifice of children and husbands to fight in war in order to protect women (and mothers), the mother's acceptance of death as well as mothers active part in mobilizing their societies by the creation of enemy images. Feminist essentialists were further criticised for using maternal thinking as a dangerous moral superiority without analysing the enshrined military logic in the divide of the militarised protector and the civilian caretaker. Mary Dietz (1985) argued, that the unequal relationship of mother and child couldn't be a prerequisite for democratic politics. By claiming the moral superiority of women through their biological, universal female inherent

peacefulness, critics (Jodi York, 1996) alerted to the exclusive new norm setting, that could only intervene in policy making by moral appeal.

The caretaker, by making the one's to be taken care of the subject of need and master of decision loses its critical space and specifically the pacifist non-violence space when taking unconditional care of those perpetuating violence. As Seyla Benhabib (1992) relates the reclusion to the private sphere of the caretaker to the notion of reason and rationality of the Enlightenment, stressing that by perpetuating the private/public divide men are encouraged to pass from nature to culture, while women remain in a 'timeless universe, condemned to repeat the cycle of life'. Militarised motherhood as essential for the state formation and gendered citizenship distribution is discussed with the understanding of power as a discursive practise rather than a pre-given setting.

The war in former Yugoslavia (Rada Ivekovic', 1997) as well as research on nationalist movements worldwide, exemplified how motherhood and caring can be used as an intrinsic part of nationalist mobilization and recruitment and how women were forced and took it upon themselves to become the archive of nationalist identity construction. But also its victims.

Gendered Citizenship

Influenced by the writings on public space and citizenship by Hannah Arendt (1958) and further elaborated by feminists rereading political theory from Plato to Marx (Mary Shanley, Carole Pateman 1991) the issue of

gendered citizenship as the enactment of agency in the political realm gained weight in FPCT. Citizenship was always a topic of concern and critical analysis for feminists and was further scrutinized by questioning the intrinsic relationship of citizenship and war participation. (Miriam Cooke, 1993, Cynthia Enloe, 1983)

Virginia Woolf in her 1936 novel, 'The Three Guineas' spun the thread between militarism and enforced invisibility of women. Similar to what Mary Wollstonecraft wrote about the French Revolution, they both contended that private and public violence is interrelated and that domination of man over women is legitimised from domestic relations to warfare. The lack of political power, the silencing of women's critical voices against war and the omnipotent power of a militaristic discourse inspired many scholars to research the complex hegemonic structures of societies, nation-states and gender relations in family and personal affairs.

In political theory during the nineteen eighties, institutions such as the military, the state, public space and International Relations were considered unacceptable, because of their underlying patriarchal construction of exclusion and silencing. The debate has changed since the nineteen nineties and elaborates more on the methodology of transformation, the epistemology of women's experience and the contextualization of theories and their agents.

For feminists such as Gayatri Spivak (1999), in order to overcome the essentialist notion of gender and identity in general, 'strategic

essentialism' is necessary. Questioning, contextualizing, historicising *grand* narratives as well as engaging in public speech, bringing the knowledge and experience of those, who had been silenced in, would bring on a less abstract, contextualized, relational reading and analysing of realities and strategies.

Gender in IR theory

For another discipline of feminist theorists, not only the relation between individual and state but also the rationale of International Relations, the relation between states became constitutive. In the early nineteen-nineties scholars in the field of International Relation theory combed through the gendered assumptions and founding myth of IR theory and its relation to war and peace. Anne Tickner (1992), Spike Peterson (1992), Rebecca Grant (1992) and Christine Sylvester (1993) challenged the notion of security used in IR theory. As Tickner (1991) reformulated Hans Morgenthau's principles of political realism, she is questioning the notion of security as military strength, power as abstract and absolute, rather than relational, the political sphere as objective, rational and independent from the domestic sphere. This leads Tickner, and other feminist IR theorists, to the assumption, that IR theory is based on the ideal of the masculine state, functioning independent of human agency. To sustain this construct, FPCT argues further, that the dichotomic constructs of masculinity and femininity, bound closely to the concept of citizen-warriors, depends intrinsically on the devaluation of femininity.

Unresearched and unresolved issues/ Future Trends

With the end of the Cold War, a change in warfare can be observed. 'New Wars' (Mary Kaldor, 1999) in failed or weak states, terrorist attacks and the increase of activities by private military security companies (PMC), changed the scenario FPCT manoeuvres in. Though the empirical evidence of the involvement of women in new wars and the activities of female suicide bombers is existent and available, there is hardly any research conducted in the field of FPCT on this issue.

Progress was made in the field of women's rights as human rights. Mass rape in war was formally acknowledged as a crime against humanity and war crimes (Yugoslavia, Rwanda). However, the implementation of the legal changes needed is vastly lacking.

The increase in militarised humanitarian intervention, including hiring of Private Military Companies by the International Committee of the Red Cross, the United Nations High Commission on Refugees and humanitarian Non Governmental Organisations needs further research by feminist peace scholars.

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See Also

Feminism and Peace
Feminism: Cultural Violence

Women and Social Change Movements
Women and War

Gender and Conflict	Women in Military Organizations
Gender and Globalization Theory	Women, Ecology, and Health
Gender and Peace Cultures	Women, Peace, and War
Gender and Violence	Women's Peace Movements, History
Gender as a Category for Analysis of Conflict	Women's Peace Organizations
Gender Roles and Conflict Mediation	Women's Rights
Gender, Socialization, and Militarism	Women's Role in Peacekeeping and Peacemaking
Nonviolence: Feminist Views	

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