

A MATERIALISTIC VIEW OF MEN'S AND WOMEN'S ATTITUDES TOWARDS WAR

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Synopsis—Women are victims in all wars. Men plan them, they train for them and they conduct them. They have the capacity to inflict pain and death, destroy people and territories. The different roles of men and women in wars dispose the two sexes to different thinking, feeling and action with regard to warfare. A similar difference of interests exists between men and women with respect to the army. For women, their children, most often sons, have made up the armies of history. As cannon fodder, women's work and life intentions are disrespected and destroyed. For men, the army consists of *comrades* who become the most important people for them because their life- and death-chances are bound up with their fellow soldiers. Finally, through history the owners of territories have been men. Women have very seldom held land, property or slaves. More often they have been sold, captured, stolen or even given away. These three contrasting relationships toward warmaking, the army, and territories provide perspectives for men and women when they discuss military matters and policies for peace.

In this article I propose that men and women are disposed to feel and believe in different ways towards war because of their different relationships to military acts of destruction, to territories and to the army. My perspective is a *materialistic* one, which means that I take into consideration how men and women *through history* have had very different positions with respect to capital and the means of production. While those who have exchanged valuable objects almost exclusively have been men, women have been and still are handled as objects in most places in the world.

This ownership role, which for almost every man means full access to his wife's and children's free labour, includes—for the leadership in a country—capital goods, tools and weapons to defend cultivated and captured land and trophies. It includes access to armies as total organizations, control over them and their strategic secrets.

During wars, the civilian population becomes, in the eyes of its military defenders as well as in the eyes of the enemy, 'things' belonging to one of the armies. To destroy the other army's relatives or dependents is to destroy the enemy's 'property'. This total *alienation* of the warriors towards large numbers of people is also a basic sign of materialism. It resembles the way capitalists come to see workers more as 'resources' than as 'people'—as parts of the commodities which they produce, rather than as similar to themselves—the creators of valuables.

Finally, to take a materialistic view means to develop a *dialectic analysis*. Conflicts and contrasts are mothers of inventions, politically and scientifically. It may inspire the technical capitalist mind to develop bombs and means of total destruction and to foster military theories of 'terror-balance' and 'dispensable nations'. But conflicts may also nurse ideas about 'conflict resolution' and negotiation procedures. It may well be that women, who in earlier

times of severe conflict have functioned as 'the women between', may come to feel responsible for developing strategies for peace, not for war.

On two different occasions during the last three decades the question of women in the armed forces has been discussed in the Norwegian Parliament (1953 and 1976).¹ In the beginning of the 1950s the opposition from women was very strong. Their protest went along two lines: the first was that men contributed to the defence of the country using 1 year or less for training in the army, while most women contributed by childbearing and childrearing; activities which lasted for a considerably longer time period. In addition, women who worked for equal rights between men and women argued that the organizational structure of military institutions would further sex discrimination to a greater extent than other organizational patterns (Lund, 1954).

General pacifist views were expressed too. Among the older generation of women, the policy of the Labour Government between the two World Wars was not forgotten. The 'broken rifle' was their ideal and the understanding of the relationship between a prosperous weapons industry and war was particularly strong among these women. In addition nonviolent actions were widely known and used with considerable success by 2-300,000 Norwegian housewives during the German occupation from 1940 to 1945 (Stene, 1976).

The proposal from the Norwegian Defence Committee in the middle of the 1970s met a protest built on feminist understanding. At this time as well as in the 1950s the cohorts from which male recruits were drawn were diminishing and the women were, once more, considered as a convenient 'reserve army'. The condition of scarce resources was easily identified by the feminists and the proposal was perceived as a false offer of equal rights built on the maintenance of a pattern of separate sex roles, a separation which would further the oppression of women in society.

But other questions were raised in addition: If women should enter the military service what kind of society would feminists wish to fight for? Would the existing social, economic and sexist order be worth defending? Would military discipline contradict central values inherent in a female culture? (Ås, 1975). Would the Norwegian army, into which we were invited, represent a true *defence* organization without attack forces meant for invading or occupying other countries? Could our country be considered unidentified with any military bloc and in that way be in accordance with the principles of the United Nation's Charter? Was not our country affiliated with the world's mightiest military alliance, one which includes all the richest nations on earth, countries which represent approximately 75 per cent of all weapon production, weapons constructed for mass destruction and genocide?

Suddenly all the women in unions, political parties and non-governmental organization were confronted with these problems. They were confronted with the fact that we are *all* responsible when it comes to taking a position on what we want to defend and how we want to do it. Every member of a society must make up his or her mind about what one would fight for: territories, privileges, superiority, freedom or justice. And one must remember that the peace, for which many people would fight, can mean the passive maintenance of an unjust

¹ Innst. S. nr 186 (1953) *Sivile i Forsvaret. Kvinner i Forsvaret*. (Proposal S. No. 186, 1953: Civilians in the Army. Women in the Army). Stortinget (The Norwegian Parliament). Oslo Dep—Oslo 1, Norway. Innst. S. nr 193 (1975–1976) *Innstilling fra Forsvarskomitéen om kvinnetjenesten i Forsvaret*. (Proposal S. No 193 (1975–1976) from the Committee of Defence about the womens' service in the Army). Stortinget (The Norwegian Parliament) Oslo Dep—Oslo 1, Norway.

world order although fighting for peace can involve active steps in the direction of greater justice among nations.

The two discussions in which the women in my country participated, gave them an experience of great value. The discussions revealed how the traditional sex differentiation in work and institutions of violence had fostered separate interests and patterns of evaluation among men and women. These separate interests had manifested themselves in different approaches to a series of relevant questions about our national defence policy. When that policy is debated by men, there is an overwhelming tendency among them to discuss the branches of the army, military strategy and technological innovation for the armaments race. Indeed, the entire debate acquires a technical-economic bias.

A DIFFERENT APPROACH

It is not entirely possible to understand the questions women ask today without looking at the social situation which has nurtured the new feminist movement in most countries. It is especially difficult for men to understand women's apparent lack of interest in matters of defence without understanding the historic background of women. The fact is that women are not disinterested, rather they have had an entirely different approach to questions about military power, war and peace, especially during the last 50 years.

To the extent that they have been publicly engaged in the problems, women have worked with the peace movements. When the First World War came to an end, an International Women's League for Peace and Freedom emerged.² With the same ideas for peace, the Women's Democratic World Federation was established; it worked largely in eastern Europe, neutral countries and countries of the Third World.

During the Cold War, new women's movements for peace appeared, for example, the Women's International Strike for Peace (WISP), which was a protest movement by women of the West against the American war in Vietnam. Since this is one of the most recent women's peace movement, it may be useful to see what it accomplished. WISP's women helped American men to escape from the U.S.A. if they were drafted against their will. The organization produced material about terrorist warfare, about the use of napalm and the use of fragmentation bombs against the civilian population of Vietnam. This material helped to shape the opposition of the American people to their own warfare. In other words, this was the construction of a counterforce, a contradiction developed by women, a struggle conducted with methods other than the most advanced technological weapons (Weschelmann, 1980). Today a new peace movement is emerging: Women for Peace. It started in Scandinavia in the spring of 1980 when it gathered half a million signatures in 2 months against the arms race.³ As I am writing this, women who have walked from Copenhagen to Paris are returning from France with news about how people work against atomic weapons and for peace negotiations all over Europe.

The new feminist movement has limited resources. Even so it is asking how, in the struggle for their own rights, women can also work for detente and for peace in the world. During the

² At the women's congress in The Hague when the International League for Peace and Freedom was formed, a manifesto was written which proposed a permanent negotiation group of neutral nations who would negotiate between countries at war.

³ *Kvinner for Fred* (Women for Peace). The address of the movement in Norway is, Trudvangveien 12 A, 1342 Jar, Norway. The address to groups all over the world is available at this address.

discussion of military service for women in the Norwegian parliament, the Storting, this was said:

'Is it true that by bringing women into today's highly technological, aggressive defence, we are really protecting the values which women, in their struggle, wish to realize? The answer—from many women, and from many men as well—is: NO. To do so means the destruction of our basic value system. This destruction takes place at the very moment napalm—and fragmentation bombs—are being planned in the brains of those who are developing them. When the great defence strategist, Herman Kahn, callously and cynically uses the concept 'Megabody' (million dead) in his books, and this has become a technological strategic expression and not a concept which deals with people and human suffering, it is then that the defence of fundamental values must be given an entirely new form. Indeed, there are many women who now believe that the whole foundation of our western cultural basis is in danger' (Ås, 1976).

It is not difficult to see that human values are no longer defended. On the contrary, weapon systems like the neutron bomb, which gives priority to material goods over human lives, threatens the humanistic traditions of European culture. More and more women are also beginning to realize that the struggle for equal rights is a larger struggle, a cultural revolution for peace which must be conducted with other weapons.

It is in this connection that the demands of women for a different perspective must be understood. Our demands are for a peace policy. Women demand concrete plans and clear goals for detente and disarmament. They know that the billions spent on the armament race have been stolen from the hands of the hungry and oppressed people of the world. They regard technological weapon discoveries which increase the ability of the apparatus of violence to kill with greater pain, and which heighten the effects of terror, with disgust and protest.

UPBRINGING AND SOCIAL TASKS

It is a part of our experience that women and men are trained from birth to take care of different functions in society. If, through their upbringing, women are allowed to reveal their emotions to a much greater degree than men, this is one of the conditions that may help maintain male dominance and power. Since a society needs both action and feelings, the women's task has been to cry in sorrow, to scream from despair and anger. This behaviour gives full meaning to the destructive actions which male soldiers perform. One could really say, that without these expressions the acts of war would be useless.

Threats are meant to scare, blows to increase suffering. In spite of this necessary link between action and reaction, male society defines women's wailing at the walls from Jerusalem to Stalingrad, as useless. And their understanding reinforces them in their conviction that crying is 'hysterical', and that hoping for peace an act of naïveté.

This is one way in which our societies have nurtured two completely different ways of approaching the problems of war and peace according to the sex of the person concerned. While those who are rich in resources, with access to technology, money and political institutions, have been responsible for war, the responsibility for peace seems to be placed on those who lack resources, technology, money and political power. The traditions are more or less maintained by the motto launched by the United Nations for the conference in Mexico in 1975. For the year of women the word 'peace' was attached: 'Equality, Development and

Peace'. Why was this important word not introduced in Stockholm, when the environment was discussed? Or in Bucharest when the population question was on the agenda?

In the global plan of action from Mexico we find no concrete references to the 'rights' of women to participate in the military services on the same level as men. But we find that expectations are clearly stated in section 50 of the document. Under the title: 'International Cooperation and Control of International Peace' it says:

'In order to attract women more and more into the promotion of international cooperation, one should recognize and encourage women's efforts for *peace* as individuals and in groups, and in national and international organizations, through the expansion of international ties among nations, strengthening of international peace and disarmament, combating colonialism, neocolonialism, foreign domination and oppression, apartheid and racial discrimination' (UN Global plan of action, 1975).⁴

In section 52 and 53 the goals are pursued further. Here it says that women should be given every encouragement to participate actively in organizations that aim at strengthening international security and peace, and developing peaceful connections among the countries, and that the UN ought to set aside a special day which shall be devoted to international peace and be observed every year.

With reference to the above, it is important to decide what such goals for women are really intended to be: is it the hope of the international community that women, to a greater degree than men, shall be capable of bringing the work for peace to a solution, now that the tension between the super powers is increasing, or is this an organizational expression of women's own feelings of hopelessness and desperation because of their lack of influence on the threat of war and the armament race?

A FUNDAMENTAL CONTRAST OF INTERESTS: PEOPLE AS THE VICTIMS OR AS THE PERPETRATORS OF WAR

I have described above the functions of upbringing, and the social premises of men and women concerning the tackling of defence as a concrete task. Women and men must clearly see that only by solving the contrast of interests that are inherent in the historical premises, will it be possible for everyone to participate in the debate about defence and peace.

Because of sex-differentiation of tasks in every-day life there are several discrepancies in men's and women's 'fates' during wars. The first is that women, at all times, have been *victims of war*, and *not* its perpetrators. This has always been the case, but the situation has been strengthened during the most recent wars, because women, the aged and children are usually included in the concept of the 'civilian population', which started to be bombed indiscriminately during the Second World War. The recruitment to the armed forces has in almost every country been men.

Among the casualties in wars, the ratio of civilian population killed, to combatants killed, is changing considerably: while approximately 95 per cent of the casualties during the First World War were soldiers, they comprised only 55 per cent during the Second World War (Uralnis, 1971). During warfare with weapons of mass destruction it is predicted that in a

⁴ The United Nations Global Plan for Action is available from every country's UN delegation or directly from State department of countries which are members of the UN.

future war, the casualties of the civilian population can amount to 95 per cent, while the well-trained armies will be able to protect themselves in a completely different way—thereby possibly amounting to 5 per cent of the total number killed.

In these prognostications, the conflict of interests between victims and perpetrator is intensified. But this also contains the core of the solution, a possibility for a synthesis. Up to now, men in the armed forces have been able to experience being winners or losers of a war. They have functioned as attackers and defenders. Men have been trained in the use of weapons for these tasks. When a defeat or a victory is a reality, men can be made to accept that this is a fact due first and foremost to the strength, training and strategies of their military leaders. In other words, for men there is reason to experience as truth that it is the competence of the army which gives the results.

On the other hand, in most societies, women do not receive military training. They do not belong to any defence organizations, and in most combat situations are left almost completely to chance.⁵

The main conclusion is that the purpose of military training for men is to build up the individual soldier's self-confidence and willingness to fight, and his *belief that his own efforts can result in his conquering* as well as surviving. There is no such alternative for women. Women are only victims of war and, naturally enough, they concentrate on working primarily to avert warfare.

At a time of weapons of mass destruction, however, much of the motivation and understanding which the soldiers receive becomes an illusion. The clash of interest between victims and perpetrators in former wars, appears to crumble. During modern warfare with weapons of mass destruction, most of us will be the victims, and that which was a conflict of interests can become a synthesis, a mutual interest.

WHO MAKES UP THE ARMY—SONS OR COMRADES?

Another discrepancy involves the relationship of men and women to the army. The majority of adult women in a country will experience the army as made up by sons (Anker, 1945).⁶ In all war literature this gives way to the picture of the soldier as a husband or lover and the women as wives or whores. These books are written by men. Making the mothers 'invisible' is a special tactic which promotes war and hinders peace.⁷

Through reproduction the child is still the 'product' of the woman more than of the man. To bear them, nurture them, and have the daily close responsibility for the children's health and welfare, in our part of the world, is first and foremost the task of women. The western male society is called 'A male society' precisely because men spend many hours together, working together, organizing themselves into mutual interest and sparetime groups, and

⁵ Conversations with women from Vietnam and Algeria reveal the desperation they experienced when armed enemies advanced and they were not possessing or able to use weapons; they insisted that under special conditions women should be given combat training.

⁶ See: von Suttner, Bertha, *Waffen Nieder*. (Lay down your arms.) Several editions. Gordon Press, New York, and Wägner, Elin and Elisabeth Tamm. 1941. *Fred med jorden*. (Peace with the Earth.) Stockholm, Sweden.

⁷ See: Shaw, Irwin. 1976. *Young Lions*. Dell, New York, or Myrer, Anton, 1975 (several later editions). *The Big War*. *Every Generation has one Chance to find Greatness*. Meredith Press, New York. In addition consult literature on secret agents and underground activities for example by Robert Ludlum. Several books from 1975 to 1978. Dell and Dial, New York.

make their problems political in the struggle for wages and production. In our Western world they can actually be said to have left their homes and the unpaid production that takes place there.

To men, the armed forces are where they are trained together with *comrades*, under the same discipline—just or unjust. Loyalty is developed among friends, cooperative partners and fellow sufferers. Thoughts are activated in a definite direction, because friendship and solidarity become the basis of one's own chance to survive. Today such concepts are not nurtured in the armed forces in relation to the soldier's family, spouse, children or parents. Even so, there is no reason to believe that the feeling of solidarity, which is created in the course of a few months, can be compared with the deep identification of the mother with her children in the course of 10, 15 or 20 years of caring for them and being with them.

If, for the purpose of comparison, we try to estimate the amount of value which an ordinary product represents, and if we stipulate the value according to the 'man'—hours it takes to produce it, the value of a child, as a 'product' is tremendous. Women have further had no chance to become alien to their 'product' which finally ends up in the war machine. A child is not chopped up in smaller parts, which are manufactured separately on conveyors in great numbers to be put together at a time of convenience. Children are *totalities*, and each of them are unique.

When the son ends up as a minor 'mechanical' part in the war machine his qualities are drastically changed. When the life of the child is lost it is indirectly a mother's loss of her own life, of her life investment and concern.

These contrasting roles which the soldier plays, from the point of view of mothers' on the one hand and planners of wars on the other, are closely connected with the way our societies separate family life from life in the public: in family life there is an extreme separation of women from the production of goods, the organization of production and the claims for a fair share of the values they have created. Thus mothers have been kept outside a situation where their political interests as 'producers of persons' has been defended.

The politicalization of so many other women's issues, however, suggests the possibility of political demands being made within the areas of manslaughter and wars.

We might very well, from the beginning of the 1980s, be confronted with demands of a different kind from those which have been made previously. These demands, made by *women*, will not necessarily be demands for equality of opportunity in the sphere of military activity. Rather, taking as their model 'person construction'—the creation of human beings, women will demand that sons as well as daughters—'shall create, build societies for human needs, heal wounds, rebuild natural resources and preserve peace'.

It is appropriate to remind the reader that ideology is always a superstructure over the relationship of the individual or group to society's means of production. When women are kept out of paid production, they are unable to use their experience from that sector on other issues relevant to them. When kept out of paid production, their rewards are sought where they *can* be found. For those who work at home, as well as those poorly paid and the part-time workers who live under a considerable degree of insecurity, the praise and rewards which work with the family provides are greedily coveted. Further, it is necessary for all people, women as well as men, to feel useful. In a state with class distinctions, where exploitation through patriarchy is strengthened by capitalism, women are kept hard at work taking care of the aged, the sick and children. Both the state and the male society profit by this, and the praising of housewifely virtues is formidable. However, during the past 50 years, the percentage of women workers in industrialized countries has increased from about 10 to

50 per cent. Now women are not only working as many hours as before with housework, they are also becoming acquainted with the models of thought of men in the unions and political economy. From these two spheres of life, women can make comparisons. And I would like to conclude this section by, once more, repeating some fairly well accepted ideas about commodity production:

To Marx, the time spent by human beings in the manufacture of a product is of significance in establishing the product's value. National 'time budgets' from a number of countries reveal only too clearly how much time women spend every day in unpaid production. Figures for Norway, from as far back as 1970, show that a woman who has at least one child under the age of 7, used an average of 5.2 hours per day or a 36-hour working week in unpaid work (Lindsom, 1974). The expression 'unpaid welfare work' has become a useful concept because it indicates that services performed by mothers in their homes—in socialist as well as in capitalist countries—have been given a market value outside the home. This fact, together with women's participation in paid production, has led to two discoveries by women: the work which results in 'praise' when she performs it within her family's code of 'duties', she is paid for outside the family institution. The second discovery is that household work is principally of 'no value' from the male society's point of view. No wonder they refrain from doing it! By the same reasoning, the male state's low evaluation of young men is made explicable. Young men, who are 'almost children' with respect to production, are of little value—except as cannon fodder: it cost little to make them and little to waste them!

Work connected with the home has previously deprived women of the right to sell their own working power as paid work, and family 'responsibilities' still hinder many women from doing so. But the phrase 'family responsibility' is created by male society from the same patriarchal ideology which automatically affiliates women with the same class as their men, regardless of their individual work situation. Marx' analysis, as well as modern patriarchal sociologists' analyses are wrong in this respect, of course. But this attribution of class affiliation has strengthened the ideology among all men, regardless of class, first that the man has the right to ownership of women's working power free of charge and second, that the patriarchal state has the right to ownership of her products (her children), without value negotiations. This is the patriarchal class society, which is consolidated by capitalism. But while the class struggle is weakened by the alienation of the workers from the bombs they create, and the military men's way of using weapons from great distances, the ties between mother and children avoid the possibility of the alienation of mothers from their 'products'.

This condition of unalienated mothering, has made 'mothers' the true 'workers' in present history. The UN figures which show that women perform between 66 and 75 per cent of all work in the world for about 10 per cent of all the salaries handed out, suggest that women are the new 'proletariat' of our time. That so many more women are becoming poor single mothers in the world and that women, totally, own only 1 per cent of all private property on earth, strengthens this picture.⁸

Many young men are beginning to perceive these dissimilarities between the male master society and the suppressed world of women. Media and politics picture the military adventures, the 'great opportunities for freedom and self-realization' for young men and

⁸ UN figures published on different occasions: the former Swedish Minister of Foreign Affairs referred to them during her party's national congress in Jönköping. Later the Finnish professor Elina Haavio-Manilla referred to them during the world Congress of Political Scientists in Moscow, 1978. Sometimes, for instance in Swedish papers the figures have varied between 66 and 75 per cent.

women. These opportunities are valued and sought after by young men and women, while on the other side the ultimate results of a warrior culture, of competition, individualism and exploitation create great inner conflicts in many of us. From this conflict between male and female culture new solutions might be created. It is from the mothers' of cannon fodder, be it sons or daughters, that the responsibility now rests to fight against the military's former mass-construction of soldiers and their recent alienation not only with their lower 'comrades in arms', but with the total human species.

WOMEN AND TERRITORIES

A third discrepancy between men and women arises in the realm of territory. It is not women who have owned and exploited countries on a large scale. They have been neither landlords nor feudal masters. In the world today, women own only 1 per cent of all private property and this percentage is diminishing. In Europe, women seem to have been richest during the late Middle Ages, from the fifteenth to the seventeenth century (Dobash, 1979).

During long periods in history, however, women have not had the right of inheritance or the right to decide about their own property. In many countries, women's share of a family inheritance is smaller than the men's. And, until quite recently, in many places in Europe, women have not been allowed to spend their salaries or to open a checking account without their husbands' agreement. It was only in 1974 that daughters of Norwegian farmers were given the same inheritance rights as the sons. Until then the oldest son would always inherit the farm, which meant that a younger brother would surpass all his sisters in his right to inherit land. This rule still holds for the members of the royal family, although in Sweden the first-born, be it a girl or a boy, inherits the throne.

On a farm, the wife is seldom paid for her share of the production of goods going to the market. She does not reap the same social benefits as her husband who owns the farm. The same is true of the commuter's wife. She may be totally responsible for all production on the farm, while the husband may consider both his salary from his work in the city and the income from the farm as his.

The weak connection of women to property in our part of the world is due, not least, to the fact that, through marriage, women are supposed to leave their families and their local community and follow the man. In the past, women were captured on war raids and given or sold to young warriors as wives. In our 'modern' societies, the woman follows the man to the place where he finds employment. Moreover, women's control of their lives is not increased much by being 'members' of the wealthier classes—rich widows are not the one's who decide over the production when they inherit a production unit. Even when widows become owners of large concerns, they have neither the education nor the legitimacy to decide what is to be produced, what the working conditions are, or how the capital is to be transmitted over national boundaries. The man who makes the decisions know this, and a rich widow usually inherits both the wealth, the routines and experts and, eventually, a clever administrative director.

CONCLUSION

The deep roots of women in the history of past centuries, their relationship to the results of war, to their own production and territories are characteristically different from those of men. Paradoxically enough, it is the weak connection of women to territories, power, capital and technology which has provided the new women's movement with an anchorage in values

which largely protect fundamental human rights. However, the engagement of women in maintaining and safeguarding peace can be made an integral part of the debate about the aims and build-up of defence, only through a clear analysis of the deep social and economic roots of the oppression of women.

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