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Feminist Perspectives on Mothering and Peace

Introduction

In the past decade we have witnessed numerous regional wars and low intensity conflicts throughout the world, unparalleled "peacetime" military expenditures, and an extraordinary concentration of wealth in many countries including the United States. As for the latter we are told there has been "no parallel upsurge of riches ... since the late nineteenth century."[1] The gap between rich and poor has widened virtually everywhere, placing mothers and children in increasingly precarious economic positions and allowing tens of thousands of children each day to die of preventable causes throughout the world.

What is going on? Where are the voices of mothers, the caretakers of the world, the hands that rock the cradles? As we all know, the connection between women and peace is ancient; peace is often symbolized as the mother, the preserver of life, the angel in the house. Appeals to peace have often been made in the name of women and children, and there is a long history of women as peace activists. After all, don't mothers have certain essential qualities derived from their roles as nurturers that can be universalized? Aren't they really nicer, kinder, gentler? Isn't it women as mothers who might possess the special peacemaking skills required for a new, more peaceful, and more just world order?

Or, could it be that the very asking of such questions is part of the age old trap of oversimplifying the notion of "woman," denying her differences with other women, exaggerating her differences with men, and thereby lessening her power? It is these kinds of questions that are placing peace researchers squarely in the centre of the contemporary feminist debate about the nature and power of women and the social construction of mothering. For all of us concerned with

the search for theories and strategies that can best mobilize for peace and justice all people—mothers, fathers, women, and men alike—these are extremely important questions.

After defining some key terms, this paper begins with a brief outline of the feminist theoretical debate among three groups: (1) those arguing that women's differences from men are minimal and should be minimalized in the fight for equity in education, employment, and the law (the equality position); (2) those holding that women, for any number of reasons related to their nurturing qualities and mothering responsibilities, are *essentially different* from men—essentially nicer, kinder, gentler and this fundamental difference should be honoured (the essentialist position); and (3) those arguing that because language itself is socially constructed, no categories of women are natural or inevitable, and attempts to categorize must be resisted (the social constructionist and poststructuralist positions). I then show how, when we integrate feminist theoretical perspectives with feminist peace research in the emerging interdisciplinary field of peace studies, we find, not surprisingly, that this theoretical debate is replicated in feminist peace research; with peace scholars generally taking the second position, the essentialist standpoint emphasizing the caring, relational, mothering qualities of women.

Because of the nature of the field of peace studies (as defined in the section to follow), there is a special urgency, poignancy, if you will, to the debate. First, who among us can say that there could ever be too much CARING in this violent world? To argue that women are *essentially* different because they are more nurturing, more caring, is to valorize many women's experiences as peacemakers in the home. Second, as is true with all oppressed groups, this feeling of difference is a powerful conscious-raising tool to promote solidarity for collective action. Humanist aspirations for a more peaceful world, where peace by definition must include an ethic of caring and a valuing of caring labour, are at the heart of the peace studies endeavour. The central question, as Ann Snitow phrases it, is: "*How* can the caring that belongs to mother travel out to become the responsibility of everyone?" (1989: 52).

Furthermore, peace studies can be seen as a critique of one of the most male-dominated of the social sciences fields, international relations. Feminist peace research, in this sense, can be said to be at an earlier stage than feminist thought emerging from the fields of literature, philosophy, history, sociology, psychology, and anthropology. For peace researchers, a feminist standpoint that focuses on caring, nurturing, feeling, intuiting, empathizing, relating remains an important new catalyst to challenge militarism. This contribution of essentialist thinking to the field of international relations and the peace endeavor is wonderfully refreshing, comforting, energizing, and affirming for women. It poses a very different set of questions than those traditionally asked by practitioners (mostly male) in both international relations and peace studies. It is thus with more than a little ambiguity and hesitation that I myself have come to see its limitations and weaknesses, and the need to move on. I must

note at the onset, too, that while most feminist peace researchers generally take an essentialist position, they also are not comfortable with this label. They clearly acknowledge the dangers and pitfalls of this essentially polarized thinking. But, as I argue here, move on we must. This article, therefore, calls first, for feminist appreciation of the contribution of an essentialist standpoint to peace research, activism and pedagogy; second, for feminist appreciation of the importance of the poststructuralist critique of essentialism; and, third, the need to move beyond the debate with a finely tuned appreciation of a variety of approaches and a tolerance for ambiguity and more than a little theoretical untidiness.

Defining the terms

For readers unfamiliar with the fields of either women's or peace studies, definitions of mothering, feminism, and peace studies as used in this discussion to follow are in order.

Mothering is a socially constructed set of activities and relationships involved in nurturing and caring for people.[2] It is also the main vehicle through which people first form their identities and learn their place in society. As Sara Ruddick points out, mothering is the procedure by which children learn "mother–tongue," a special language in which they assimilate "a sense of what can be named and what must remain secret; what is unavoidably given and what can be changed; who is to be feared and whose authority is only a sham" (1989: 35). At the heart of mothering as it is commonly understood in contemporary Western society is an ethic of caring—of knowing, feeling, and acting in the interests of another. Although mothering usually refers to the thoughts and activities of women who have willingly assumed the responsibility for the caring, nurturing and socialization of their biological, adopted, or step children, the process of defining mothering is not this simple or clear cut. I have *all* "caring labour" in mind when I speak of mothering—from birthing labor to all kinds of teaching, to care of the disabled and of the frail elderly.[3] This is because all women, and some men too, have in one way or another internalized the socially constructed mandates of mothering in their given societies at any given point in time.

As for feminism, the general working definition with which I am comfortable can be stated quite simply. It takes as proven the historical oppression of women and stresses the interrelationship of theory and practice to eliminate it. Virginia Sapiro describes this sense of feminism more fully as:

> ... both a way of thinking about the world, and a way of acting in it. ... [It] is a perspective that views gender as one of the most important bases of the structure and organization of the social world. Feminists argue that in most known societies this structure has granted women lower status and value, more limited access to valuable resources, and less autonomy and opportunity to make choices over their lives than

> it has granted men. Feminists further believe that although this gender-based world may be organized around biological facts such as the exclusive capacity of men to create sperm and the exclusive capacity of women to bear children, gender inequality is due to the social construction of human experience, which means that it should be possible to eradicate it. (1986: 440-41)

Feminism, as I view it then, is both a way of viewing the world and an evolving social movement. As noted, feminism does not embrace one theoretical approach, but rather several. This chapter will focus on the contributions of (1) the essentialist standpoint that holds that women are essentially different from men (nicer, kinder, gentler) and should be so regarded in analyses of peace, power and gender; and (2) its feminist critics (poststructuralists and others) who argue that essentialists have been oblivious to the social construction of language itself, leaving women resistant to change and insensitive to the diverse experiences among women.

Peace studies, as defined by one widely accepted guide, is a relatively new, interdisciplinary academic field that "analyzes the causes of war, violence, and systemic oppression, and explores processes by which conflict and change can be managed so as to maximize justice while minimizing violence." It includes "the study of economic, political and social systems at the local, national and global levels, and of ideology, culture, and technology as they relate to conflict and change" (Thomas, 1987: 5). One of its primary and most controversial assumptions centres on the interrelationship of peace research, education, and action.[4]

There are within the field, of course, widely divergent views as to definitions of peace, much controversy over issues of an "implicit ideological bias," and even more worry about the "activist orientation" of peace studies curricula. My definition focuses on the values, norms and institutions of peace. It incorporates such concepts as structural violence, racism, sexism, class, religious and ethical perspectives, international law, and global cooperation. It leans toward the pro-active and methodologically qualitative bent of many, if not most, of the over 300 university peace studies programs.[5]

As a feminist, I would have to say that peace studies so broadly and positively defined can have no meaning unless it is in the context of feminist thought, particularly that of the social construction of gender and mothering. Militarism has shaped our economic priorities for the past forty years; its use of the resources and capital of this country has depleted medical, educational and social programs, thus creating a new, primarily mother/child poverty class. When the concept of peace implies that every human being regardless of sex has the right to a life that includes fulfillment of basic human needs, then much of feminist research can also be considered peace research. And much of peace research *must* focus on the intrinsic value of caring, of mothering as we have come to understand it.

Women as peacemakers and feminist theory

The gentle, caring, peacekeeping, qualities attributed to women have not always been celebrated by feminists. Virginia Woolf, the harbinger of much in contemporary feminist thought, described her relationship with Coventry Patmore's (1876) *Angel in the House* like this:

> It was she who used to come between me and my paper when I was writing reviews. It was she who bothered me and wasted my time and so tormented me that at last I killed her. You who come of a younger and happier generation may not have heard of her—you may not know what I mean by The Angel in the House.... She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult art of family life. She sacrificed daily. If there was chicken, she took the leg; if there was a draught, she sat in it—in short she was so constituted that she never had a mind or wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others. Above all ... she was pure. (Woolf, cited in Noddings, 1984: 59)

In what has been referred to as "liberal feminism," the "equality position," or Stage 1 of the contemporary feminist movement, the angel in the house was if not squashed at least repressed. That is to say, the caring, peacekeeping aspects of women's activities were not the focus. Mothers certainly were not the focus. Building on the work of Simone de Beauvoir (1974) in the late '40s and Betty Friedan (1963) in the early '60s, feminists saw the glorification of mothering as an instrument of women's oppression.[6] Feminists called for the right not to mother, documented the darker side of the mothering experience, and advocated a more equitable sharing of the responsibilities for child rearing in the struggle for job equity. They argued that the institution of motherhood as currently defined was harmful to children and to mothers themselves. In fact, up until the early 1970s feminists tended to deny any important differences between women and men, thereby playing down the central role of nurturing in gender identity.

Many feminist theorists outside of the liberal camp rather than focusing on the joys of mothering began to analyze the inequities of home labour. Radical, Marxist and socialist feminists showed how capitalism combined with patriarchy made both home labor and market labor gender specific, with women's status both economically and psychologically disadvantageous. They argued that most women's work as presently carried on in home and market, including child care, helped to perpetuate male domination and the capitalist form of production.[7]

Although there was only a most tenuous relationship between feminist and peace research until the mid 1970s, portrayals of women as peace activists generally reflected this feminist theoretical position. Most peace researchers

were neither women nor feminists, and many feminists considered peace studies a diversion from the main task of liberating women. It was left primarily to a few feminist scholars (most of whom would not have called themselves "peace researchers") to acknowledge the role of earlier pioneers such as Bertha von Suttner, Jane Adams, Emily Greene Balch, and members of the Women's Peace Party and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF). Their major objective was to show that some women did play a role in social and political history and could be counted among men for equal citizenship.

By the mid 1970s, however, a number of scholars had begun to argue that the first wave of feminist theorizing had invalidated ways of knowing that seemed characteristically womanly. This second wave of feminist theorizing takes a posture that seeks to discover and validate women's lives in the concrete labors of their daily experiences. The standpoint (later to be labeled "essentialist") assumes a separate female world, one in which women are essentially different from men—more caring, more cooperative, more peaceful.

With a psychoanalytic lens, sociologist Nancy Chodorow (1978), for example, argued that women, because of the ways in which they were mothered, are more caring, more nurturing, less differentiated, more relationship preoccupied than men. In fact, they spend their lives nurturing in one way or another and reproduce daughters who do the same. Carol Gilligan (1982), while acknowledging her intellectual debt to Chodorow, takes the celebration of traditional female virtues a step further. Challenging developmental theorists like Freud, Piaget, Erikson, and Kohlberg, she regards the nurturing traits so frequently associated with mothers as strengths rather than weakness. In fact, women with their mothering/caring labour are, in a certain sense, more moral than men. Women know that,

> ... in a world that extends through an elaborate network of relationships, the fact that someone is hurt affects everyone who is involved, complicating the morality of any decision and removing the possibility of a clear or simple solution. Thus, morality, rather than being opposed to integrity or tied to an ideal of agreement, is aligned with the "kind of integrity" that comes from "making decisions after working through everything you think is involved and important in the situation," and taking responsibility for choice. In the end, morality is a matter of care. (147)

Many feminists enthusiastically agreed with Gilligan (1982) that because of maternal practices women have developed an ethic of care quite different from men. They, along with Gilligan, believed this ethic amounted to a certain way of thinking characterized by such descriptive words as receptivity, relatedness, responsiveness, connectedness, intuitiveness, ambiguity, ambivalence, feelings, empathy, and caring (Belenky, Clichy, Goldgerger and Tarule, 1986). It

is a way of thinking that, actually and not just theoretically, should socialize each new generation to nonviolent behavior and to a peaceful world order.

Male violence, according to Gilligan, stems from problems in communication and men's lack of knowledge about human relationships. "If aggression is tied, as women perceive, to the fracture of human connection, then the activities of care ... are the activities that make the social world safe, by avoiding isolation and preventing aggression rather than by seeking rules to limit its extent." In this light, she contends, "aggression appears no longer as an unruly impulse that must be contained but rather as a signal of a fracture of connection, the sign of a failure of relationship" (1982: 43).

Among feminists concerned with peace studies and peace education strongly influenced by Nancy Chodorow (1978) and Carol Gilligan (1982) were Betty Reardon (1985), Birgit Brock–Utne (1985), Nell Noddings (1984), and Sara Ruddick (1989). With the Freeze movement and increased peace activism globally in the early eighties they and others began to turn to issues involving peace, but their research was of a very different kind from that being done by the World Policy Institute and male–dominated established journals such *The Journal of Peace Research* and *The Journal of Conflict Resolution.* Their perspective grew out of the realization that the process of conducting corrective and compensatory research had shown that the scientific method itself was tightly structured around such conventions mirroring ideal traits of Western white males as objectivity, freedom from values, abstract reasoning.

Betty Reardon's (1985) influential monograph, *Sexism and the War System*, growing out of her experiences with the World Policy Institute and the World Order Models Program in the 1970's and early eighties, is representative of this second stage of feminist thinking. Contending that within the field of peace studies most researchers have viewed women's issues as secondary or collateral to the central concerns of peace, she calls for an integration of feminist scholarship with peace research whereby the need for inner psychic transformation on a personal level is appreciated as much as the need for global political and economic change. She develops a feminist peace paradigm focused on the Yin and Yang aspects of being, contrasting such characteristics as gentleness and strength, receptivity and dominance, caring and competing.

One of Reardon's central metaphors is mothering: conception, labour, birth and nurture. She writes of humane and fulfilling human relationships, personal change, vulnerability, and pastoral images of peace:

> The lion can lie down with the lamb in a nurturing rather than devouring relationship, only if each is able to transform its reality by transforming itself. These transformations are what peace studies should be about. (1989: 25)

Reardon (1985) and other feminist peace researchers see an unhealthy imbalance toward male principles in modern society, leading to war, aggres-

sion, greed, and other embodiments of "manly" aspects, rather than the more conciliatory and constructive "womanly" aptitudes. "If the world itself seems under siege, and if that siege holds any community and all children hostage, the effort of world protection may come to seem a 'natural' extension of maternal work," writes philosopher Sara Ruddick (1989: 81). The logical extension of the argument is that the world would be a safer place if the female element is stressed. Clearly, according to this standpoint, mothers should find war a contradiction and global peace an integral part of their maternal work.

But, as Reardon (1985), Brock–Utne (1985), Noddings (1984), Ruddick (1989) and most essentialist thinkers readily acknowledge, women often support wars enthusiastically and vigorously. Noddings points out that "Women ... too want to belong.... An important virtue of the good woman ... is her generous support of her man's conception of honour" (1984: 203). Ruddick, however, calls this maternal trait "inauthenticity," and she laments that mothers all too often believe that their children's interests depend on their country's military strength, even though they may hate wars in general. She finds that very few mothers "take the world as an object of extended maternal care" (1989: 81,113), and she, too, fears the temptation to celebrate the caretakers while forgetting their failures. She also fears an emergent self–righteousness that while condemning violence forgets to tend to its root causes (Ruddick, 1989: 135).

In the final analysis, most feminist peace researchers cautiously yet hopefully conclude that it is women/mothers with a feminist consciousness and politics who are most likely to become truly effective peacemakers. For example, Ruddick writes: "By increasing mothers' powers to know, care, and act, feminism actualizes the peacefulness latent in maternal practice." It is her belief that "feminism is already conjoined with a peace politics that is marked by its double origins in women's traditional work and feminist resistance to abuse against women" (1989: 242).

Feminist criticism of women as peacemakers

Not all contemporary feminists are as sanguine about the nurturing attributes of women as the theorists discussed above. As bell hooks writes:

> The resurgence of feminist interest in motherhood has positive and negative implications for the feminist movement. On the positive side there is a continual need for study and research of female parenting which this interest promotes and encourages.... On the negative side, [by] romanticizing motherhood, employing the same terminology that is used by sexists to suggest that women are inherently life–affirming nurturers, feminist activists reinforce central tenets of male supremacist ideology. (1985:135)

Critics argue that essentialist theory has an exaggerated focus on the

differences between men and women. British feminist Lynne Segal, striking her central theme as to the inadequacy of polarized thinking about men and women, writes: "This has meant a minimal interest in conflicts and contradictions as they are experienced within feminine identity, a false universalizing of our own gender categories and a disregard for other social practices (outside mother–daughter bonding) as they impinge upon gender identity" (1987:148). We need to be asking a different set of questions Segal and others assert. How else can we explain diverse historical and cultural forms of femininity and masculinity? How else can we explain women's behaviour that does not conform to maternal thinking? How else can we explain mothers who send their sons to war? How else can we explain the angry, sad, and bitter stories of some mothers? How else can we understand the lives of women who do not wish to be mothers?

Even on the familial level the record of women as being inherently more life–affirming appears to be mixed. For generations we have been reading from the male perspective about the pathological implications of these mothering qualities—with mothers being blamed for all "social deviations" of their children from mental illnesses to juvenile delinquency to matters of life styles and sexual orientation. While the essentialist standpoint has done much to modify this crazy assignment of responsibility to women alone, it has not left mothers with a sense that they are standing on terra firma. Jane Flax, criticizing Ruddick's "maternal thinking" thesis argues that, "important things like rage, frustration, aggression, sexuality, irrational intense love and hate, re–experiencing of one's own childhood, blurring of body boundaries, conflict between demands of a child, one's mate, other children and other work are missing" (1984: 13). And Lynne Segal writes, "The weight of one's own children can mean a contradiction of social vision, an envy and resentment of the welfare of others. ... While it may be true that women are more concerned about peace and a better world ... this does not necessarily mean that women are any less nationalistic, racist, or committed to class privilege than men" (1987: 6).

My own conclusions from a study of mothers of sons (120 mothers with sons age fifteen and older) are that on the familial level, women's perceptions of their roles as peacemakers are far more ambivalent, complex and conflict–ridden than one might conclude from a reading of Chodorow (1978), Gilligan (1982), Reardon (1985, 1989), Noddings (1984), or Ruddick (1989). Although most of the women with whom I spoke identified themselves as peacemakers within the family, some expressed ambivalence and often downright anger with their roles, especially when it was between father and son. They would say: "To be in the same room with them is to set my stomach churning. I am sick to death of it"; or "I've lied for my son so many times just to keep the peace that I hardly know how to stop!" (Forcey, 1987: 86). A woman describes how she feels it is time to detach herself from her adolescent son and his father, to abandon the mediator role for her own psychic health:

> You know, you get tired of being this intermediary. Being the sponge for everyone's pain, being the only shoulder there is to cry on, being the only one for whom they can utterly fail. There have been days when I have been so obsessed with what was going on between Lee [son] and his father that I hardly knew who *I* was or what *I* felt about anything. You know, you only owe your children so much. (Forcey, 1987: 87)

When women define peace in the family as merely the absence of conflict, as many in my study did, their communications with sons often becomes limited to the inconsequential or non-controversial. They feel impelled to sweep differences under the carpet, at tremendous cost to their own self–esteem, growth, and peace of mind, as well as that of their children. For example, a mother poignantly described how her fear of confrontation made it doubly difficult for both her and her son to come to terms with his homosexuality. Two women told me they could not bear to burden their sons with the knowledge of their battles with cancer. Another described how she could not bring herself to ask her son about his experiences in Vietnam, thereby shutting herself out of a part of her son's life both he and she needed to share (Forcey, 1987: 91). Researchers in the field of alcohol and drug addiction find that mothers of addicted sons tend to forgive, cover up, make excuses, and avoid communication on this subject while feeling angry, hurt and responsible on the inside (Forcey, 1987: 94). In what mothers of sons considered to be the line of duty, I concluded that many opted for a limited honesty and openness—one that suppresses anger and hides the self.

In the public sphere, as we have seen, most feminist peace researchers themselves readily acknowledge that the record regarding women's support of national wars is problematic at best. Women as well as men are committed to what they regard as "the national interest." Jean Elshtain writes, "The woman of republican militancy is no mere victim of events; rather, she is empowered in and through the discourse of armed civic virtue to become an *author* of deeds––deed of sacrifice, of nobility in and through suffering, of courage in the face of adversity, of firmness in *her*, and not just her polity's 'right'" (1987: 93). The old mothering myth, as expressed in the work of Simone de Beauvoir , has it that "every mother entertains the idea that her child will be a hero," and the hero is, of course, a son. "A son will be a leader of men, a soldier ... and his mother will share his immortal fame...," she asserted. Women as second sex, as other, as the inauthentic one, seeks to define herself in her son's deeds, and what better path than that of patriotism (1974: 55, 576).

This myth needs revision, however. In my mothers of sons study I discovered many women who encouraged their sons to join the military not at all for reasons of patriotism but rather because they view the military as the only available means of shifting the mothering responsibility—be it psychological, social or economic—from themselves alone (Forcey, 1987: 117-135). I con-

cluded that mothers who turn to be military in search for such things as help in making their sons more mature, more self disciplined, less addicted to drugs and alcohol, or better trained for a job certainly were not to be castigated. Similarly, Barbara Omolade points out that African American women have a legacy of support of war because the military represents economic opportunity and social status for black men, and now black women too. "Few black women can live outside the dilemmas posed by this predicament. Which war zone does she protect her son from: the military or the street?" (1989: 184). Ironically, while many mothers like myself celebrate the recent talk of base closings and troop cutbacks, many other mothers lament the prospect of a demilitarized society because they have no where else to turn but to Uncle Sam.

And what about ordinary women outside of the United States who by no choice of their own are participants in national political conflicts? An emerging literature is providing portraits of women who have sacrificed bravely and fought fiercely for principles beyond the familial (see, for example, Ridd and Callaway, 1987; Agosin, 1987; Fourtouni, 1986; Gioseffi, 1988). For example, Marjorie Agosin tells a moving story of the *arpilleristas,* women in Chile who make the small appliqued and embroidered wall hangings that portray the suffering of women and their families under the repressive military dictatorship of Pinochet. It was the upheaval in their personal lives (the arrests, "disappearances," exiles, and deaths of their sons and loved ones), that obliged them to take political action and learn to speak as a collective voice. As one woman put it, "Because of all this suffering we are united. I do not ask for justice for my child alone, or the other women just for their children. We are asking for justice for all" (cited in Agosin, 1987).

Another example of this emerging literature are the ten essays in *Women and Political Conflict,* edited by Rosemary Ridd and Helen Callaway (1987), describing women's experiences in the war in Cyprus, the Islamic revolution in Iran, the national struggle in Northern Ireland, the ideological conflict within an Israeli kibbutz, the Breton separatist movement in France, and the struggle by Turkish migrants in West Berlin to maintain their ethnic identity. It needs to be pointed out, however, that while rich with portraits of courageous women, this book, like others, concludes that these women see themselves as powerless beyond their genius to survive, and, the editors argue, "in terms of the wider political systems, must be seen as relatively so."

As I have written elsewhere, these books give voice to women whose lives have been turned upside down by political conflict (Forcey, 1988). The stories serve to remind those of us who care about women's and peace issues that the terrible cost of war and political conflict is paid by women as well as men; that women have used their informal powers to express their political will, bravely and even heroically. The books also remind us how cautious we must be about embracing a theoretical perspective that celebrates "mothering" values and virtues while minimizing the fact that this gender construct falters before broader power structures. The experiences of many women involved in conflict

throughout the world illustrate the fact that the force of what women as nurturers do on the interpersonal level—whether in the family or the work place—is painfully problematic in the global arena.

In addition, what about the women who *choose* to be part of their country's political and military conflicts? What about the growing numbers of women, including mothers, serving in the United States military since 1973, for example? The National Organization for Women (NOW) supports the move for women to be eligible for combat on the perfectly rational ground of professional opportunity equity. Congresswoman Pat Schroeder has written a bill to adopt a Pentagon group's suggestions that the Army test women in combat roles. Also, syndicated columnist Ellen Goodman has come down on the side of women in combat, arguing that "any war that isn't worth a woman's life isn't worth a man's life." And what about the voices of the eager young American women who served in the Persian Gulf War pleading for the privilege of combat duty.

Poststructuralism

With this growing literature on women's relationship to issues of peace and war, it has become clearer than ever that men throughout the world continue to have greater access to power, wealth, and privilege than women. However, it also has become clearer that feminists are having increasing difficulty coming to agreement on the theories and strategies needed to explain and challenge these inequities. Feminist peace theorizing now fluctuates ambivalently around a standpoint (one increasingly supported by men in the field) that focuses on the identification of essential psychological/sociological differences between men and women and one that acknowledges the distortion and disadvantages of this stance. It grapples with this difference versus equality debate both on theoretical and strategic levels. The tension, writes Anne Phillips, is "built into the feminist project. Men and women are different; they are also unequal; feminists will continue to debate and disagree over how far the inequality stems from the difference, and how far the difference can or should be eliminated" (1987: 22).

That it is time, however, to move beyond the difference versus equality debate is the emerging consensus at least outside the peace studies field. As long as women find themselves in the political context of these present times, comments historian Ruth Milkman:

> ... feminist scholars must be aware of the real danger that arguments about "difference" or "women's culture" will be put to uses other than those for which they were originally developed. That does not mean we must abandon these arguments or the intellectual terrain they have opened up; it does mean that we must be self-conscious in our formulations, keeping firmly in view the ways in which our work can be exploited politically. (1986: 394-5)

Joan Scott, taking Milkman's point further, argues that the equality–difference debate can be an intellectual trap, one out of which feminists must move. "When equality and difference are paired dichotomously, they structure an impossible choice. If one opts for equality, one is forced to accept the notion that difference is antithetical to it. If one opts for difference, one admits that equality is unattainable." How then, Scott asks, "do we recognize and use notions of sexual difference and yet make arguments for equality?" The only response, she answers, is a double one: "the unmasking of the power relationship constructed by posing equality as the antithesis of difference, and the refusal of its consequent dichotomous construction of political choices" (1988:172). In other words, feminists need to recognize that the antithesis of difference is not equality but rather sameness; and the antithesis of equality is not difference, but rather inequality.

The analytic perspective Scott and many contemporary feminist social scientists find most valuable for moving beyond the difference versus equality debate is poststructuralism. This approach, based on the borrowings from the humanities with its attack upon the methodological assumptions of modern science, on the one hand, and its questioning of the status of all knowledge on the other, is providing a major challenge to the essentialist standpoint in the fields of international relations and peace studies.[8] In this context, it is referred to as "the third debate"—a loosely defined and evolving cluster of attitudes toward theory and practice that takes into account a whole range of analytical approaches and "for all its heterogeneity has a number of thematic connections that help to identify it and explain its over arching critical purpose" (George, 1989: 270).[9]

Poststructuralism does not have one fixed meaning; rather, it is applied to a wide range of theoretical positions derived from the work of Derrida (1976), Kristeva (1986), Althusser (1971), and Foucault (1966, 1873, 1979).. In its myriad, it can be defined as a broadly interdisciplinary approach that disputes the underlying assumptions of most social sciences—epistemological foundations, the Enlightenment heritage (faith in the idea of progress and rationality), and a social science methodology modeled after the hard sciences with its search for generalizations, simplifications and verifications. Rather than focusing on personality, behaviour, attitudes, goals, and choices it turns attention to language, symbols, alternative discourses, and meaning. It holds that knowledge is grounded in language and language does not reflect "reality." And it is language itself that creates and reproduces a world that is never definitive but always in transition (Rosenau, 1990: 86). In some senses, It is really easier to say what poststructuralism is not, than what it is. This is partly because it resists definition on empirical grounds and partly because it is still in its infancy. Poststructuralism's positive identity has yet to be formed. Its proponents, however, do agree that it aims "to destabilize and render open to question all claims to an absolute foundation"(Rosenau, 1990: 102).

In her discussion of the contribution poststructuralism can offer contem-

porary feminism, linguist Chris Weedon (1987) articulates a specific version that is able to address the questions of how social power is exercised and how social relations of gender, class and race might be transformed. This is not to say that the differences among forms of poststructuralism are not important; but rather, that they are not equally productive for feminism.[10] Poststructuralists, according to Weedon, deny the assumption that women and men have essential natures. They refuse to "fall back on general theories of the feminine psyche or biologically based definitions of femininity which locate its essence in processes such as motherhood or female sexuality." This does not, however, "rule out the specificity of women's experiences and their difference from those of men, since, under patriarchy, women have differential access to the discursive field which constitutes gender, gendered experience and gender relations of power in society"(1987: 167).[11]

Clearly influenced by poststructuralism, Carol Cohn's (1989) widely discussed essay, "Sex and Death in the World of the Defense Intellectuals," is another example of new directions toward which feminist peace research may be turning. Cohn considers how the language of the defense intellectuals is a reflection of the ideas that express and construct men's power in relation to women. It is a language tenaciously rooted in and around us, reinforcing sexism and militarism. Cohn describes her own transformative process, that of learning the language while participating in a Harvard–MIT summer program on nuclear weapons designed for college teachers, followed by a year as a participant observer at the Center on Defense Technology and Arms Control.

The language (she calls it technostrategic) is clearly masculine, one based on a uniquely male rational conceptual system that excludes human beings and connections. Her own transformation went through several stages: Stage 1: learning to listen to white men in ties discussing clean bombs and clean language, missile size, fathers, sons and virgins, domestic bliss, male birth and creation, God and nuclear priesthood; Stage 2: learning to speak the language (noting the allure of power and white male privilege) and feelings of control, escape from thinking of oneself as victim; Stage 3: learning to dialogue and finding that it could not be done in English (she notes, for example, that the word "peace" is not part of the vocabulary, one must use "strategic stability" instead); and Stage 4. feeling the Terror as she realized that she herself was being transformed, that not only was she speaking in this language—she was thinking in it.

The transformative process Cohn (1989) describes is truly a dilemma for feminist peace researchers—one for which Cohn offers no simple answers. The dilemma is this: women will not be listened to by those in power if they cannot speak the language—yet the very process of learning the language leaves them unable to speak their concerns, i.e., to stay connected to human lives, to be caring, nurturing, mothering. Cohn suggests that the language itself may not really articulate the "rational" strategies upon which nuclear weapons development and deployment decisions are in fact made. Rather technostrategic

discourse might be functioning more as a gloss, an ideological curtain behind which the actual reasons for these decisions are made. Nevertheless, she believes women have two tasks: one is a deconstructive project that involves first learning and than deconstructing the language ("beating the boys at their game"); the other is a reconstructing project to create "alternative visions of possible futures"—with "diverse voices whose conversations with each other will invent those futures" (Cohn, 1989: 64).

Preferring the term postmodernism to poststructuralism, political scientist Christine Sylvester defines the project as:

> a form of critical theory which questions secure knowledges and practices and seeks to open up policy processes to those who have been spoken for and "protected" by purveyors of certitude and security. It is a community—of radical doubters, tolerant dissenters, neo–anarchists, seekers of knowledge at the hyphens of lived experience. Unabashedly pro–women, it also is alert to other groups historically silenced within the master discourses of androcentric modernity. (1989a: 1)

From this position, Sylvester (1989b) challenges the theses of essentialists like Brock-Utne (1985, 1989), Reardon (1985, 1989), Chodorow (1978), and Ruddick (1989), arguing that women are not naturally opposed to war and for peace, and that peace and war are all of a piece, rather than negations of each other. At this moment in time, she argues, that piece is patriarchal. It is patriarchy itself that damages and distorts women's perspectives as well as those of men: women may be embracing (and calling our own) peacemaker images that reflect and serve the prevailing gender order, leading to a denial that liberation brings pain, confusion, and loss. She questions the value of what she calls "establishment–supporting gender expectations" for the end of patriarchal society as we now know it. "It is inappropriate," concludes Sylvester,

> to draw sharp conclusions about interrelationships of women, peace–lovingness, women warriors, and strategies for tipping patriarchal war–peace pieces in more feminist directions. This thinking is very much in process and is also healthfully incoherent. Suffice it is to say we should carefully examine claims that war and peace are negations of each other, and that women are unified in a natural or conditioned opposition to war and embrace of peace. (1989b: 57)

The feminist challenge for peace studies

The challenge for feminist peace researchers, as I see it, is to recognize such dilemmas as those highlighted by Cohn (1989) and Sylvester (1989b). It is to acknowledge the tension between needing to act as women who value mothering/caring labor and needing an identity not over determined by our gender.

The challenge is about difference and equality; it dramatizes women's differences from men and from each other—and it sees the necessity of sometimes making common cause. It is about resisting claims that some categories (like mothering) are natural and inevitable.

It is to remember that, as literary critic Ann Snitow points out, "in a cruel irony that is one mark of women's oppression, when women speak *as women* they run a special risk of not being heard because the female voice is by our culture's definition that–voice–you–can–ignore." And it is to remember that, again as Snitow puts it, "the alternative is to pretend that public men speak for women or that women who speak inside male–female forums are heard and heeded as much as similarly placed men" (1989: 40).

This is not to argue that poststructuralism offers the only acceptable theoretical approach to feminist peace research. On the contrary, I fear there is a danger that rigidly self–defined poststructuralist advocates, particularly those on the extremely skeptical side, can lessen the critical and constructive voices of women for peace. As Marx put it, "The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world ... the point, however, is to *change* it." If we can do nothing more than acknowledge the multidimension-ality of all reality, than where does this leaves us? It is difficult, to say the very least, to be part of this community of radical doubters and also to be part of the feminist peace activist community.

After having considered feminist analyses of women's diverse experiences as peacemakers and nonpeacemakers on many levels from the familial to the international, I conclude that the argument that women because of their nurturing capacities are essentially different from, and perhaps on some levels better at peacemaking than, men should be neither dismissed out of hand nor embraced as the *truth.* Rather, I argue for a more complex picture, one that sees the essentialists and their poststructural critics as part of the whole picture—part of the changing social construction of gender. I argue that both positions are politically vital catalysts for developing strategies for change—a "don't throw the baby out with the bath water" position.[12] As Sara Lennox has recently pointed out, this means "acknowledging both similarity with men and difference from them; seeking solutions to women's problems in (or from) both the public and the private sector, the public and the private sphere; understanding women's embodiment as both natural and cultural; and both making universalist claims to women's common humanity and insisting on differences among them" (1992: 652).

Feminist peace researchers, then, must be both radical doubters *and* believers. Lynne Segal puts it this way: "What guarantees we have...come from women's and men's engagement in a whole variety of political campaigns against militarism and arms production, and more" (1987: 201). The challenge for a feminist peace studies is to honor the special mothering peacemaking skills of many women (and men) while questioning impulses to universalize them. The challenge, to put it another way, is to be ever vigilant of the age old trap of oversimplifying the notion of "mother," denying her differences with other

mothers and other women, exaggerating her differences with men, and thereby lessening her power. And, most importantly for me as a feminist peace researcher, peace educator, and peace activist, the challenge is continue to reflect upon, value, and question the feminist assumptions, theories, and strategies that can best mobilize mothers and fathers, women and men for a more peaceful and just world.

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[1]See conservative political analyst Kevin Phillips' (1990) description of wealth in the Reagan aftermath.
[2]This is the definition agreed upon by Evelyn Nakano Glenn, Elsa Barkley Brown, and myself as organizers of a conference entitled "Contested Terrains: Constructions of Mothering," held at the State University of New York at Binghamton, October 12–13, 1990. The approach is closely linked to feminist theoretical work on the concept of gender as a central organizing feature of political, cultural, and social life developed over the past 15 years. We agree with Belenky, *et al.*, that "all knowledge is constructed...that answers to all questions vary depending on the context in which they are asked and on the frame of reference of the person doing the asking" (1986: 137–38).
[3]I agree with Sara Ruddick's (1989) position, in *Maternal Thinking*, that mothering is hard to define precisely. She takes the position, however, that while maternal work is central to caring work it is not the whole and should not be made to stand for it. I find the lines between "caring labor" of most women and mothering to be fuzzier. See also Nancy Hartsock (1983); and Nell Noddings, (1984).
[4] COPRED (the Consortium on Peace Research, Education and Development) by its very title illustrates this point.
[5]It should be emphasized that it is my sense of the field based on my work with COPRED and the Peace Studies Association PSA. Others may disagree, particularly in the greyer area of conflict resolution. George A. Lopez has developed a useful conceptual map of peace studies for those beginning or developing peace studies programs. It includes three areas of substantive foci: 1) causes and consequences of violence; 2) methods for reducing or resolving violent conflict; and 3) the values, norms, and institutions of peace (1989: 76).
[6]I discuss their contributions to mothering more fully in my book *Mothers of Sons: Toward an Understanding of Responsibility* (1987).
[7]See for example, Benson (1969); Vogel (1973); Molyneux (1979); Gimenez (1978). For a history of the contributions of early radical feminists see Echols (1989).
[8]See Rosenau (1990) for a skeptical overview of poststructuralists' challenge to international relations.

[9]See also Lapid (1989) and Rosenau (1990).
[10]This is the position taken by Weedon (1987: 20). In this article I have chosen to use the term "poststructuralism" rather than "postmodernism" for convenience and because there is considerable overlap, with some even finding the terms synonymous. See, for example, Walker (1988: 86).
[11]I choose to focus on poststructuralism's more moderate, feminist adaptation from an international relations perspective as a useful framework for understanding power and for developing strategies for peace and change.
[12]Most of the essays in Hirsch and Keller (1990) also argue that feminists must take a "both/and" position on this difference debate.

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