Combat, Feminism and Gender Theory: A Timeless Attrition

Comprehending How Feminist and Gender theorists Explain War

International Relations Theory and Praxis

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Abstract:

War and conflict transcends as the epitome of violence against women; the deafening silences of which linger on throughout our history. The continuing oppression of women has made it imperative for a feminist interpretation of war. We live in a binary world, where social constructs triumph the calibre of individuals. Division of the world into two segments- masculine and feminine has given patriarchy an impetus to further instigate violence against women. "Fanatical enthusiasm was the mark of a real man.", "any idea of moderation was just an attempt to disguise one's unmanly character" (Thucydides 431-404 BC)[1].

In this research paper, we endeavour to comprehend the nuances of feminist and gender theory and the interwoven intricacies in war and conflict- attempting to give the research an elucidation of how feminists explain war. Although feminism carries a tinge of controversy in the modern day, the impending danger of gender theory if unexplained has worse implications.

Keywords: feminism, gender, war, masculine, feminine, conflict, violence

Introduction:

The idea of feminism in international relations along with other fields of study in the spectrum pertaining to issues of politics, power, war and conflict has been heavily overshadowed with the experiences of men (Tickner 1992). International relations' feminists' works, namely of J. Ann Tickner, Cynthia Enloe, Mary Wollstonecraft, have shaped the contemporary thought of feminism and gender roles. Feminism, in its fundamental form, is the fight for equality among men and women. Women are perceived to be inferior and men superior, notions that have inherently played into power and politics.

War and conflict mean differently to women- fear, violence, sexual violence, loss of beloved ones, displacement, death, higher responsibility, *inter alia* (Laukka 2018). The association of acts of valour with men and victimhood with women is a direct consequence of various social, cultural, and political constructs with patriarchy emerging as the epicentre. Civilians in general, are the collateral damage of war. Albeit all strata of the society are brutally affected during war, women bear a larger brunt of its aftermath. The introduction of the United Nations

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[1] Van Evera & Mendeloff; quoted in 'Causes and Prevention of War', May 7, 1998.

Security Council Resolution 1325 adopted in October, 2000 was a turning point for pursuing the agenda of civilian women and their suffering during times of conflict.

Through this research paper, we answer the complex question of how feminists and gender theorists explain men and women along with their roles in making war and peace.

Methodology:

This research paper would focus on content analysis of various scholars and the case study (Darfur Conflict, Sudan) approach. Literature review of Gender War and Militarism: Feminist Perspectives (Sjoberg and Via 2010), the report 'Women War and Peace' by Elisabeth Rehn and Ellen Johnson, 2002, and other scholarly works of J. Ann Tickner form the basis of my research.

Gendered Optic on Security, State & War

Feminism as a function can be discerned as "a political theory that coexists with and interacts with a political movement dedicated to eradicating the problems that women experience because of their sex" (Sjoberg 2006) (Ruddick 1989). Feminism is a movement to give the subjugated voices a forum for equality. Gender theorists stem away from the biological implications of a sex assigned at birth and comprehend the social constructs which have been inherently drilled into the fabric of the society. By applying these theories and approaches to militarism, war and conflict, we arrive at an exponentially high gender inequality; how war has resulted in complex gender roles, ideologies, intersectionality, *inter alia.* As we diverge from 'nature' and converge towards the concept of 'hegemonic masculinity', feminists trust that they can shed light on different causes of war that are overlooked in conventional and critical perspectives. Consequently, this process results in deeper analysis of the correlation between different forms of violence, unjust social relations, gender hierarchies which significantly contribute to insecurity in the community (Tickner 2001). Establishment of states itself carries the onus of providing security to its citizens, which, feminists argue has been innately discriminatory; inception of states has been largely masculine in nature where men accept the realist assumption of existence of violence and war. By marginalizing their female counterparts, women are portrayed as a "softer" and peace-making gender, to provide a stark juxtapose to the adjectives associated with men- warriors, valour, strong, manly, courageous, *inter alia* (Eichenberg 2016). As per the United Nations' Human Development Report, there has been a dramatic growth of civilian casualties from 10% at the dawn of the century to 90%.

Although there is no dissipation of individual sexes affected, women are among the worst afflicted. Ironically, they constitute roughly only 2% of the world's army workforce (Tickner 1997). Nevertheless, they are expected to adhere to sanctions, situations of economic and physical insecurity. (UN Sanctions on Iraq post Gulf War, 1991); due to their maternal instincts, women are often associated with words such as compassionate, weak, peaceful, calm, *inter alia.*

What is the relationship between gender, feminism and war? According to Joshua S. Goldstein, 'culturally constructed gender identities enable war' (Goldstein 2001). He states: "Gender roles adapt individuals for war roles, and war roles provide the context within which individuals are socialized into gender roles."[2]

Usage of male/female for sex and masculine/feminine for gender are synonymous with policy and security rhetoric. This 'typical' conversation has compelled the portrayal of women as 'innocent of war' (Sjoberg and Peet 2011). The probability of women's involvement in combat may be exponentially lesser than their male counterparts. Nonetheless, it doesn't eliminate violence from their lives. The insecurity of sexual violence, domestic abuse, political oppression, et cetera, is not restricted only to conflicts. The dominance and subordination hierarchies must cease to ensure security. Feminists frequently link the epiphany of genuine security with human rights of all people (Laukka 2018).

We now analyse the above arguments using a case study.

Case Study: <u>**Conflict in Darfur (Sudan)-Women Mere Tools for Ethnic Cleansing**</u>

<u>Background:</u>

On the western part of Sudan lies Darfur, bordering Libya, Chad and Central African Republic. Darfurians are a blend of multiple ethnic groups due to migration, intermarriage, mixing, etc. The Darfur conflict is a consequence of geographical, economic, cultural, social and political instabilities. Darfur's post-colonial governments were subjugated by the Arabs[3]. This agitated the non-Arab population, sparking resistance and civil war, erupted in 2003, the 'world's worst humanitarian crisis'. This 'Land Cruiser War' began with its two rebel groups, the Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM) and Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), recruited from the

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[2] Goldstein considered gender roles to be pervasive across human societies.
[3] Arabs speaking elites belonged to the north and central Sudan and created identities based on Arabism and Islamism

Fur, *Masalit* and *Zaghawa* ethnic groups resisting the government of Sudan, accusing them of oppressing the non-Arab demographic of Darfur by supporting the militia group Janjaweed. This resulted in the death of innumerable civilians, violence against women and children; summons to Sudan's President, Omar al-Bashir on account of genocide, war crimes and violation of human rights. For the purpose of our research, we will be focusing solely on violence against women; particularly, sexual violence.

Offering a Feminist Perspective

Many feminist scholars have endeavoured to establish 'conceptual links' between gender subordination, sexual violence, and genocide (Hale 2010). The author emphasises that suffering of women in genocide must be viewed through the cultural lens, identified as "*gendercide*". Despite the visibility of women as victims during crisis or conflicts, their suffering is highly normalized. The war in Sudan and its men inflict pain and sexual violence on the women of another culture to establish their hegemony, to cleanse or erase their culture. The perpetrators use rape and sexual violence to target that culture- to both erase and mark that significant distinction between Arabs and Africans, that is, *gendercide*. (Hale 2010).

Amnesty International (2004) [4]has reported that, "rape and other forms of sexual violence in Darfur are being used as a weapon in order to punish, humiliate, control, inflict fear and displace women and their communities. Girls as young as 7 were tortured; women were raped in public and in front of their families. Rape had become a mere tool or weapon to terrorize women in order to ascertain their masculinity. Abductions and sexual slavery was increasingly common. The taboos associated with culture and religion; humiliate women as rape continues to exist as a social stigma. According to the society, a woman must be fit enough to be married and start a new life, a form of empowerment that the futile hegemonic masculine perpetrators of Janjaweed aim to strip women off; apart from their dignity and right to life. Negligible access to healthcare exacerbates the horrifying condition of Darfur women. The African Union UN Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) reported 191 cases of sexual violence, affecting 135 women, 54 girls and 2 boys of which rape and attempted rape accounted to 80%. [5]

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[4] Source: http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AFR54/076/2004

[5] Source: https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/countries/sudan-darfur/
The information is based on the Report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council (S/2020/487) issued on 03 June 2020.

Conclusion:

Gender violence has subtly integrated into mainstream politics as inevitable aftermath of war and conflict. Feminists and gender theorists explain war not through the perspective of social or cultural constructs but through the struggle of such constructs and the voices of the suppressed. Since time immemorial, women have been dominated by men, at combat or domestically. This requires a paradigm shift-with greater investment socially, economically, and politically; *inter alia* higher levels of education, healthcare, political representation. It is this momentum that assures security to women and not military spending. Many women have risen above atrocities; stories that are inspiring and horrifying at the same time; chasms that remain unfilled. Women are assigned tasks of rebuilding post conflict and excluded once peace is restored. When it is women who are rampantly affected, how can they not be a perpetual resource in the peace-building system, even in the 21st century?

 Feminist curiosity, as described by Cynthia Enloe, "is a distinctive curiosity that begins with taking women seriously" (Laukka 2018). This research has opened up avenues that were previously shut; case studies that require in-depth analysis and attention. As a researcher, I confronted many novel ideas pertaining to gender theory and feminism through this study. Women hardly start wars and negligibly continue them. Women have the ability to achieve peace and rebuild war-torn societies (Rehn and Sirleaf 2002). Men along with women need to address these sensitive issues to ensure equality. Women are capable of major transformations despite the atrocities they face; they're crucial in shaping an egalitarian society. In conclusion, albeit repeatedly dismissed, it is a woman's maternal instinct that compels her to give life and not take it. Women would thus, oppose war to find better alternatives to resolve conflicts (Goldstein 2001).

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