

Male Violence: Links Between Peace and War

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This annual two weeks of activism, as a lot of you will know, was started more than twenty years ago by the Centre for Women's Global Leadership (CWGL) at Rutgers University. This year the theme is 'From peace in the home to peace in the world: let's challenge militarism and end gender-based violence'. They've called on us to foster what they call 'a strategic conversation' on the links between militarism and male violence against women.

I like that expression. And maybe that's how we can see this evening, as part of that 'strategic conversation'. That's to say, notwithstanding this impressive university venue, this won't be an academic lecture, but I want to emphasize activist strategy.

I need to start by saying a bit about my work, which has itself been a kind of long conversation. All my working life I've been engaged in action-related research and writing from a feminist perspective. So practically everything I've written has its origins in the experience of other people, it's what I've learned from them. For the last twenty years I've been absorbed in four or five long projects that have brought me into touch with antiwar activists in a score of countries and dozens of organizations.

I've studied their circumstances - but also tried to grasp the meaning they make of things - their analyses; and to learn their strategies - what they think they can do. So my books aim to put their experience and wisdom out and about, and invite discussion, in the hope that we may learn from each other and strengthen our movement. Our movement of movements.

In this talk I plan to introduce a sequence of four or five concepts that I've gathered from these experiences 'out there'. And in some cases they're prompted by the CWGL's briefing for this 16-Days. Where I can, as I talk, I'm going to invoke the activists in different countries who I've heard making a case for these ways of thinking as they devise their strategies of action.

- The first is the concept of a **continuum of violence** - the notion that violence of different types, on different scales and in different periods can be perceived as a series, a succession of events that have something in common and in some cases may be causally linked. I want to suggest that can help us recognize continuities between the various violences of peace and of war.

- Second, **patriarchy** - or rather, let's say more accurately the notion that all societies have a **sex-gender order**, just as they have an economic order, and a political order. The CWGL briefing speaks of 'the **systemic** nature of gender based violence'. So yes, we need to get above and beyond the simple observation that some men do bad stuff to women, and recognize gender relations as being **systemic**, and as involving power.
- Third - that'll bring me to focus more precisely on the **gender relation as cultural**, as shape-able. The 16-Days theme document speaks of the 'culture' that normalises violent masculinity. So I want to ask, what more might we do to make gender transformation a concern of social policy and activism?
- The fourth concept is **violence reduction**. I want to suggest that **violence is a choice**. It isn't inevitable. And saying 'reduce violence' rather than just 'stop rape' or 'end war' usefully brings peace movements into alliance with movements against male violence against women.
- And finally, I want to turn to **commonsense**, a notion that Antonio Gramsci used as a technical term: the way of thinking that prevails, or holds sway, in a society. I want to suggest that what our movements may be aiming to do is replace a hegemonic fatalism about violence with a new and different sense of what's normal and acceptable.

First, then, the **Continuum Of Violence**. The first place I read this expression was in a pioneering booklet titled *Piecing It Together: Feminism and Nonviolence* written in 1983 by a group of women in War Resisters International who called themselves the *Feminism and Nonviolence Study Group*. They wrote:

As nonviolent feminists we've watched a growing acceptance within the Women's Liberation Movement that individual men attacking individual women is one end of a continuum of violence which leads inexorably to the international military abuse of power... The continuum of violence emanating from patriarchal power pervades all our lives, from the nuclear family to the nuclear state... what we are aiming for is an integration of the two critiques of violence...

About twenty years later, that term 'continuum of violence' has flowered in the titles of a lot of articles and books. One way of alerting ourselves to links between different manifestations of violence is to take a gender lens to it, so as to see the masculine-feminine dimension, gendered causes and effects. But there are other ways of seeing it too. We live in violence continua (in the plural) that run along several axes. For instance: we can think of a continuum of **scale of force**: so many pounds per square inch when a fist hits a jaw, so many more when a bomb hits a military target; a continuum of **social scale**: violence in a couple, in a fight between street gangs, violence between nations; **and type of weapon**: hand, penis, boot, machete, gun, missile. We can imagine a **continuum of place**: a bedroom, a street, a police cell, a

continent; **and time**: during a long peace, pre-war, in armed conflict, in periods we call 'postconflict'.

The instances in the chain of violence may in some cases be causally linked - as when an abused child grows up to become an abusing adult; or when economic exploitation and political repression, conditions Johan Galtung has called '**structural violence**', causes people to erupt in **physical violence**. But violence can be 'catching' in other ways too, through contingency, association, affinity and suggestion.

To turn now to **Patriarchy** - as a particular version of a sex-gender order, one characterized by male dominance. The notion of enduring adaptively-reproduced systems of power such as a mode of production and a sex-gender order was rubbished in the postmodern nineties. But ironically in that very decade wars broke out all around us that seemed to cry out for such explanations.

One was in Yugoslavia. The women who persuaded me that we just can't do without a concept of patriarchy are a group called *Zene u Crnom*, or Women in Black, in the city of Belgrade, the capital of Serbia. I pay careful attention to what they say, because they lived through the transformation between the late 1980s and early 1990s of a relatively peaceful Serbia, in a federal Yugoslavia, into a militarist, nationalist and re-christianized society bent on ethnic cleansing. Yugoslavia under the League of Communists had introduced formal gender equality. At least it was assumed women would work, for equal pay, on equal terms with men, and the state provided child-care to enable it. Of course, the official equality policy didn't deliver everything it

promised. And a feminist movement grew in the 1970s to demand more. But... when they began to lose it, women began to value what they'd had.

First came a struggle over the mode of production. You'll remember that in the 1980s the West had been striving to convert Yugoslavia from a socialist system with a lot of state and collective ownership to a capitalist market economy. And it worked. The IMF imposed structural adjustment as the price of loans. It brought economic misery. Men experiencing unemployment for the first time, became disillusioned with the communist system. They were vulnerable to the nationalist ideology which began to surge through Serbia as socialism went into retreat.

The new nationalist ideologues had a clear gender agenda. They were proclaiming a 'demographic threat' from Muslims' higher birthrate - they called it the "white plague". They said Serb women must stay home and get pregnant. A good Yugoslav woman used to be the one who built socialism by her labour power. Now, the good Serb woman was the patriot who would regenerate the nation by mothering its sons. Reproductive rights women had taken for granted came under attack - their public status too. In Yugoslavia women had a quota of 30% of seats on public bodies. In the first multiparty elections of 1990 the quota was dropped, and women's representation collapsed to less than 2%. The thing is this...women could hardly fail to notice that the **nationalism** now dominating politics, pervading the media and filling the streets was not only **militarist** and **militarizing** - it was also and quite specifically **masculinist**. The Orthodox Christian church had sprung back to life as communism receded. The religious leaders, filling the airwaves, urging on the national revival,

were **patriarchy** in a pure, unmitigated form that young Yugoslavs had never witnessed before.

Clearly, if the warmongers were doing patriarchy, war-resisters had to do **feminism**. Stasa Zajovic was an activist in the Centre for Antiwar Action. It was a small but vital opponent of Milosevic. But it was male-led and it showed no signs of recognizing and opposing the (literal) virulence, the masculinism, of the nationalist and militarist movement they were resisting. So Stasa and other women left the mixed movement, and set up *Zene u Crnom* – Women in Black. The name was suggested to them by Italian women supporters, who had adopted it from the Israeli women of the anti-Occupation movement.

Stasa and other Belgrade feminists wrote a lot back then, and they still do today: they're great communicators. Travelling, speaking, they worked out for us in those years a feminist antimilitarist standpoint, forged in the fire of the Yugoslav disaster. It was an analysis that said : Yes, war is caused by political factors, the **nation state system**, with its claims to territory and ethnic singularity, its hatred of foreigners. And yes, economic factors too... we've seen how **capitalism** is a cause of war. But – also (not instead but also) **patriarchy**, ages old but still alive today, has to be recognized as a root cause of war. Like feminist activists I've met in other countries, in Colombia, in Japan, they use the word patriarchy with much less hesitation than we have come to do.

I don't think this is the time or place to go into the historical emergence of a male-dominant sex-gender order. But if you're interested, there's a very compelling and careful account by Gerda Lerner in her book *The Creation of Patriarchy* (1986). Suffice it to say that these three sets of power relations, of class, race and sex, are of course totally interlocked, intertwined - intersected as the jargon has it - because the people who've controlled and still control economic resources and the ones who've governed political, religious and national structures, have tended to be men, with group interests as men, so that the institutions have enhanced the existing gender order.

When people say, surely that's all in the past.... Well, no. Ask the women how it is in Belgrade today. And don't let's even mention ISIL, Da'esh, the Islamic State, and what's going on in Iraq and Syria. Maybe it's enough to recall what a struggle it was to arrive at last month's decision by the Synod of the Church of England to permit women to become bishops!

The question is, how does a male dominance system survive, modulated but real enough, into modern times and Western societies? This brings me to my third concept: the **GENDER RELATION** as an aspect of culture, as something socially shaped and shape-able. And the idea that this needs to be central to the thinking of peace activists.

Male dominance, a patriarchal order, doesn't survive by inertia. It adaptively reproduces itself from one generation, one epoch, to the next by cultural means: the

social construction of masculine and feminine as two ways of being, men and women as two kinds of person, unequal and complementary. These tendencies are extreme in some cultures, more subtle in others. But often we find that boys tend to be valued more highly than girls. They tend to be shaped to become people with a sense of entitlement, with qualities that make them adequate to power, to be ready to use force. Proper manhood is associated with rivalry and confrontation, with attack and defence, with weaponry and warfare. Women tend to be shaped to see men as important, to be liable to comply, to experience being dominated as erotic.

We don't all get so conditioned, of course. There are counter-currents, counter-cultures that enable a few to rebel, a few to escape. Some women become feminists. Importantly, some men too choose to live their masculinity differently – I'm thinking of the men of White Ribbon for instance. If by chance you don't know the campaign, have a look at their website, and see their pledge to work together as men to end male violence against women. As we marched through London to 'Reclaim the Night' on November 22, they were there, as we've come to expect, standing with their banners alongside the route. These men are our allies. There are too few of them.

BUT the cultural association of masculinity and violence is amazingly pervasive. I was very struck in early November by the way my local TESCO branch, and indeed every TESCO branch I passed, suddenly sported images of a man in fatigues with an assault rifle. Did you notice it? The windows of these family supermarkets were plastered with posters advertising the newly-launched video game *Advanced Warfare*.

It's the latest in the series *Call of Duty*, the product of Sledgehammer Games, a subsidiary of Activision. An earlier game in the *CoD* series *Black Ops 2* broke all records by grossing half a billion dollars in sales in the first 24 hours, twice that much in the first 15 days. *Advanced Warfare*, they were predicting, was going to outsell it.

As I'm sure you know, Sledgehammer's recent products are what are called 'first-person shooters'. The gamer chooses, holds and fires a weapon. 'You' aim and fire it. You score by 'wounding' and 'killing' your opponents. I read some of the reviews. On the website PCGamer the reviewer enthused about the addition of new weapons in this update of the game. He wrote: '

Guns are littered everywhere and they're fun to shoot: big, powerful, varied, some punching single shots through armour, others spraying corridors with death. ..the dramatic sounds, the death animations are addictive feedback. There's even a beam weapon...and heaving its energy stream between targets, watching them drop and die, is disgustingly satisfying.'

He went on, 'with the new Exo-suit that gives the wearer superhuman powers, I'm a walking, running, jet-jumping massacre.'

Well, maybe you have a friend or relative who's treated you to an introductory massacre on their state-of-the-art console. But if not, look for it on YouTube - it's easy to find. A short clip of *Advanced Warfare* lets you try out your talent for slaughter.

Prepare to be deafened and blinded by impacting bullets, exploding flesh, equipment and buildings. But also, as David Crookes insists in his review of *Advanced Warfare*, expect to 'feel at ease'. Your controller 'vibrating violently', you can't fail to admire the script writers', 'crisp dialogue'. Crisp dialogue!!

My reason for dwelling on this game in the context of the *Sixteen Days of Action against Violence against Women* isn't actually to suggest that *Advanced Warfare* is a woman-killing pastime. It's not as bad as some in that respect. In a rival game, you probably know it - *Grand Theft Auto* - it had been possible, for instance, to choose to have sex with a prostitute, and then choose to shoot her, instead of paying. Actually, Sledgehammer Games warn against 'toxic' and 'misogynistic' playing of *Advanced Warfare*. In fact, you do have the option of adopting the persona of a female shooter. It'd be interesting to speculate who, and how many, make this choice. The game is, for all that, profoundly gendered and everything about it, its packaging, its marketing, its hype, is unmistakably designed to appeal to men and boys. I'd argue that we should take such popular pastimes as significant elements of contemporary culture.

The phenomena of endemic male violence against women, on the one hand, and the militarization of the dominant form of masculinity in our culture, on the other - while they are not the same thing - aren't totally unrelated. The uniformed, Exo-suited and rocket-toting man that *CoD: Advanced Warfare* enacts, promotes and sells is brother to the controlling, sexually-privileged man who is favoured in our contemporary everyday cultures. It is not accident that 87% of board members of FTSE 100 corporations are men; 90% of those serving in the UK armed forces, ie. trained for

socially-endorsed violence, are men; while 95% of those committing violent crime are men, and 99% of those committing violent sexual crime are men.

The patriarchal gender relation, as we live it, as culture - the women of Belgrade, and many other antiwar feminists - tell us, is one of the things that makes war thinkable. Makes violence normal. Predisposes us to support leaders whose idea of diplomacy is military intervention. Which is why, some women are saying, transforming gender relations can be classed as work for peace. Feminist activism against patriarchy not only is a part of peace activism, it's a necessary part. What's more, men could see not masculine loss but human gain in such transformative change, and bring into their antiwar activism their own critique of the way masculinity is exploited for militarism. Peace movements won't reach their goal without it.

With that in mind I'd like to say a bit about what that goal might be thought to be. In the six countries I visited when researching for the book '*Antimilitarism*' I encountered a lot of widely different antimilitarist movements and moments. But even here in the UK, think of the range of organizations we have - all pretty different: Stop the War, CND, Trident Ploughshares, WILPF, Women in Black, Peace Pledge Union, the Quakers, and so on. As I wrote the final chapter I asked myself: around what does this movement of movements against the means and forces of coercion cohere? What beliefs might they be said to share?

After a lot more thought and reading, I came to the conclusion that one idea we might seem to share is this: my fourth concept - **VIOLENCE IS A CHOICE**. We can see

violence as elective, as discretionary. It's a course of action that can be chosen, or unchosen. In most circumstances, we, as individuals, as groups, and as a society, can choose between a less violent or more violent course of action. This is probably a minority view, in society as a whole. The prevailing idea, I think, is that violence is a fact of life. It's deplorable, but it's natural. It's in our genes. It's our fate.

This is an immobilizing belief, and it's very useful to our rulers, to the ones who profit from war, politically or economically, those who have an interest in sustaining militarization. It justifies an ever-expanding security industry - and heavy policing on the home front too. Unfortunately even some parts of the Left see revolutionary violence as necessary – and indeed as cathartic. Peace movements, by contrast, are defined precisely by rejecting such fatalism, whether biological or historical. I don't think we proclaim the possibility of a totally violence-free world – we're not that naïve. Not all of us are total pacifists: some see necessity in some armed responses. But all the same we propose a project of **violence-reduction**.

This circles back to what we were saying just now – the idea that violence, its types, scale, levels and moments, can be visualized as a continuum, a series. One link is between cultural representation, as in video games, and actual physical violence. And while we can't test every link for its precise causality, we can see probabilities. Men who are trained to be combative are not likely to be conciliatory in the family. Lads who spend their days shooting people dead on an X-box are likely to have a lower threshold in responding to a challenge on the street.

Actually, I was struck by reading an article in *The Guardian* - it was the very same day I'd noticed that my TESCO had become a war-zone. The headline was 'Mother distraught over jihadi son's death'. It was a report about a young man, Kabir Ahmed, 32, a British father of three from Derby. He had recently died in a suicide attack in Iraq. In an ISIL podcast some months before, his mother said, Kabir had described his life with the Islamic State as 'freedom, totally freedom...the good life, actually quite fun'. He said 'I walk round with a Kalashnikov if I want to; with a rocket propelled grenade launcher, if I want to.' He added, 'It's better than - what's that game called, *Call of Duty*? It's like that but, you know, in 3D. You can see everything's happening in front of you. It's real, you know what I mean?'

In this light, thinking of continuities, links, perhaps causes, certain kinds of cultural activism can be seen as an important component of peace movements. And gender transformation is precisely that - cultural activism. And to the extent it gains hegemonic sway, it can become cultural policy. What measures in education, youth work, sport, vocational training, might have shaped Kabir Ahmed in a masculinity different from the one that led him to fight and die for ISIL?

The place I learned most about cultural work for peace was South Korea. I found, roughly speaking, three kinds of movement there. One is antimilitarist, active and loud in opposing things like - the South Korean government buying certain fighter aircraft, or contributing troops to NATO's wars. Second, there's a strong movement that works for reunification with North Korea and looks for partner organizations there. You can see there'd be tension between the two movements - for instance,

while the first is strongly opposed to all nuclear weapons, the second for tactical reasons is not too critical of the nuclear missile programme of North Korea.

But there's a third and different kind of peace work that goes on in South Korea, aiming to span the gap between the other two. I'll tell you about two organizations that are characteristic of this. I find something beautiful and inspiring in both of them in their different ways.

One is *Women Make Peace*. Elli Kim, who's one of its founders and activists was my research companion and interpreter in Korea, so I got a good feel for what they're about. *Women Make Peace* have existed for twenty years. They have an office, with three fulltime and five part-time staff – it's for real. They call themselves autonomous feminists. They campaign with others against militarism. But additionally they have a strong belief that to engage effectively in struggles for peace you have to start with nonviolence in your own life. For them, the violence of war doesn't only occur in war, it's intimately related to everyday violence. So their projects include meditation and discussion groups, and above all, peace education, from a feminist perspective.

The second group that has something of the same philosophy is *People's Solidarity for Participatory Democracy*, (PSPD). It has a Centre for Peace and Disarmament, and a journal *Korea Peace Report*. PSPD say 'let's admit there are problems in both North and South Korean society, let's unite to deal with them – let's transform both states'. Lee Dae-Hoon told me they call their initiative 'the peace state' idea. They mean a state in which the 'security' paradigm is replaced by a 'peace' paradigm. The

security state constructs fictitious external threats for purposes of internal control. This process is guaranteed through the combination of patriarchy, specifically male supremacy (Lee Dae-Hoon actually uses these words), and authoritarianism, and other non-democratic belief systems. The state should not be allowed to monopolize security affairs, as it does. Civil society must trespass on that terrain, he says. We need to 'social'-ize and 'civil'-ize security. And together, the civil societies of countries in the region should work to reduce their militarization and together create what he calls an 'East Asia Common House'. It's an idea, a vision. I think PSPD are a wonderful example of strategizing around the idea of violence reduction, finding innovatory ways of thinking about how to transcend the impasse on the Korean peninsula. Are they just dreaming? Or could their idea prevail?

And here I come to my fifth and final concept, '**COMMON SENSE**' used in the special way that Antonio Gramsci uses it in his *Prison Notebooks*. What is or can become a society's prevailing idea - its hegemonic ideology? Forgive me if I'm repeating here things you all know very well, but I've always been very touched by the thought of Antonio Gramsci, his lifelong ill health - his huge achievements, and then those 8 years imprisoned by Mussolini. He was only 46 when he died. At his trial, his prosecutor stated: 'For twenty years we must stop this brain from functioning'. That they couldn't do. In his *Prison Notebooks* one of the ideas he worked on was modes of rule. He observed that not every state is a police state. Not all ruling classes need to use physical coercion to get their way. In a lot of cases people consent to be ruled. They're swayed by dominant ideas, the ways of thinking of the ruling class, the bourgeoisie. In our society today, what does common sense tell

us? Well, one thing maybe: ‘the capitalist market is the only realistic way of ordering society’. Deny that, and you sound just a bit crazy, marginal. But a few dreamers say ‘Another world is possible’. Gramsci wrote about the potential for just such an idea, generated by the working class and progressive alliances, to win adherents and become an alternative convincing idea.

I think that notion of a new common sense, a set of understandings and beliefs that could displace prevailing thought and come to hold sway in society can encourage us as we work to achieve a less violent society. Could violence-reduction become the new common sense? Antimilitarist and peace movements are vital in addressing immediate issues: like abolishing nuclear weapons, challenging the use of drones and so on. But the bigger potential of our movement of movements might lie I think in widespread, long-term, many-sided cultural work, work that aims to make some thoughts unthinkable and new thoughts thinkable.

Take little kids. The old commonsense: spare the rod and spoil the child. The new commonsense: that slap I give my toddler harms me and her, both. I have a choice. And boys... today's commonsense says: Boys will be boys! He'll feel left out if I don't get him *Advanced Warfare* for Christmas. All his friends will have it! A different commonsense: there's more than one model of boyhood a parent can foster. There are other Christmas presents. I have a choice.

Think about rape. Common sense says: look at that skimpy skirt, she's asking for it! A different commonsense: 'Whatever we wear, wherever we go; yes means yes, and

no means no'.... A man has a choice: he can choose to respect her choice. Think about nuclear weapons. The old commonsense: the world will take our nation seriously if we possess the bomb. The new commonsense: the world will respect us more if we obey international law and decommission our Trident submarines. We have a choice.

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