



## BIROn - Birkbeck Institutional Research Online

Segal, Lynne (2008) Gender, war and militarism: making and questioning the links. *Feminist Review* (88), pp. 21-35. ISSN 0141-7789.

Downloaded from: <https://eprints.bbk.ac.uk/id/eprint/2675/>

*Usage Guidelines:*

Please refer to usage guidelines at <https://eprints.bbk.ac.uk/policies.html>  
contact [lib-eprints@bbk.ac.uk](mailto:lib-eprints@bbk.ac.uk).

or alternatively



## **BIROn** - Birkbeck Institutional Research Online

---

Enabling open access to Birkbeck's published research output

### Gender, war and militarism: making and questioning the links

#### **Journal Article**

<http://eprints.bbk.ac.uk/2675>

Version: Accepted (Refereed)

#### **Citation:**

Segal, L. (2008) Gender, war and militarism: making and questioning the links <i>Feminist Review</i> 88, pp. 21-35
--

© 2008 Palgrave Macmillan

[Publisher Version](#)

---

All articles available through Birkbeck ePrints are protected by intellectual property law, including copyright law. Any use made of the contents should comply with the relevant law.

---

[Deposit Guide](#)

Contact: [lib-eprints@bbk.ac.uk](mailto:lib-eprints@bbk.ac.uk)

## **ABSTRACT**

The gender dynamics of militarism have traditionally been seen as straightforward, given the cultural mythologies of warfare and the disciplining of ‘masculinity’ that occurs in the training and use of men’s capacity for violence in the armed services. However, women’s relation to both war and peace has been varied and complex. It is women who have often been most prominent in working for peace, although there are no necessary links between women and opposition to militarism. In addition, more women than ever are serving in many of today’s armies, with feminists rather uncertain how to relate to this phenomenon. In this article I explore some of the complexities of applying gender analyses to militarism and peace work in sites of conflict today, looking most closely at the Israeli feminist group, New Profile, and their insistence upon the costs of the militarized nature of Israeli society. They expose the very permeable boundaries between the military and the civil society, as violence seeps into the fears and practices of everyday life in Israel. I place their work in the context of broader feminist analysis offered by researchers such as Cynthia Enloe and Cynthia Cockburn, who have for decades been writing about the ‘masculinist’ postures and practices of warfare, as well as the situation of women caught up in them. Finally, I suggest that rethinking the gendered nature of warfare must also encompass the costs of war to men, whose fundamental vulnerability to psychological abuse and physical injury is often downplayed, whether in mainstream accounts of warfare or in more specific gender analysis. Feminists need to pay careful attention to masculinity and its fragmentations in addressing the topic of gender, war and militarism.

## **KEYWORDS:**

gender; militarism; peace movements; New Profile; Israel; masculinity

## **GENDER, WAR AND MILITARISM: MAKING AND QUESTIONING THE LINKS**

‘Good Bush’; ‘Bad Bush’, came into view on one side, then the other, of a placard being rotated by a woman in the midst of the largest political demonstration in London’s history, the two-million strong march against the looming invasion of Iraq, in February, 2003. This was an international day of action, with millions of people protesting in sixty different countries around the world. A month later the man parodied as Bad Bush, supported by the then British Prime Minister, Tony Blair (soon ‘Bliar’, to the poster scribes), declared war

on Iraq. The catastrophic repercussions that have followed continue to this day. The gendering of the pro and anti-war sentiment on that massive anti-war march was familiar, if the comic iconography novel – man's face, woman's pubic hair. Women of every age group, but especially younger women, were more critical of George W. Bush's decision to invade Iraq: in the USA only 52 per cent of women under twenty-five supported the (second) US war in Iraq in 2003, compared with 82 per cent of men. (The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 2003). Nevertheless, it is too easy to see the gender divide here as a reliable guide to women's commitment to peace making.

### Women's Engagements with Warfare

Historically, women's relation to war and peace has been varied and complex. In general, the majority of women have supported the wars their leaders have waged, often, all too literally, in their name – men at war, allegedly fighting to protect women and children back home. Directly and indirectly women have played a crucial role in wartime: usually, in their devotion to men in uniform and their disrespect for those who refused to fight (even handing out white feathers to men out of uniform during World War One); sometimes, in their zealous support for military dictators, most memorably in their admiration for Hitler and Mussolini during the rise of fascism in Europe last century; periodically, when allowed to fight or appear on the battlefield, in their enjoyment at joining what they saw as the quintessential world of men (see Gilbert, 1983; Segal, 1987: 162-303). Women gained more than the suffrage through their participation in the First World War, with Virginia Woolf, Vera Brittain, Vita Sackville-West (despite their later pacifism), all well aware of the 'wild spirits' war unleashed. In the words of Vera Brittain: 'The glamour may be a mere delirium of fever ... but while it lasts no emotion known to man seems as yet to have quite the power of this enlarged vitality' (Brittain, 1978, pp.291-2). Nor any passion known to women either, some suggest.

Neither today, nor yesterday, have there been any necessary links between women and opposition to militarism – even among feminists. The connections, for those of us, myself included, who believe we have good reason to make them, have to be teased out and argued for, whether we do it tactically, through arguments we feel we can best direct at women, or in the firm belief that it is easier to mobilize women than men against militarism. There are more women than ever before fighting in today's armies. However, for some women, including feminists, the battle is to improve the conditions for the women inside them, not to confront the practices of warfare itself. In the USA, for instance, it is estimated that one in seven soldiers is a woman, with more than 160,000 women having already served as soldiers in Iraq, Afghanistan and the Middle East since 2003 (Benedict, 2007). As Helen Benedict's research highlights, the single main problem these female soldiers are reporting is their fears of harassment, rape and violence from the men who serve with them, with little, if any, protection provided by the army itself. One of many studies underlining this problem, conducted during 1992-3, reported that 90% of female veterans of the Gulf War claimed to have been sexually harassed in the military, ranging from rape to relentless teasing and constant intrusive staring. Serving in Iraq with the National Guard in 2005, Mickiela Montoya told Benedict that she carried a knife with her at all times: "The knife wasn't for the Iraqis," she told me, "it was for the guys on my own side" (Benedict, 2007). Even more bizarrely, Colonel Janis Karpinski, the only high ranking officer demoted, from her position as Brigadier General, for her role as commander of Abu Ghraib during the public scandal over the sadistic torture of male prisoners, has recently become a strong critic of the military's negligent treatment of its women soldiers. She reports in her book, *One Woman's Army*, that three women soldiers died of dehydration in Iraq because they were afraid of being raped by male soldiers if they walked outside to the toilets for water, after dark (Karpinski and Strasser, 2005). There is more than one way of seeing women's issues in relation to the military. We need to be cautious drawing the links between gender and militarism.

Nevertheless, whatever women's support for or engagement in warfare, it is also women who have often, in greater numbers, organized against militarism and committed themselves to working for peace. Usually, when doing so, they have mobilized support through arguments referring to their distinct position and experiences as women, particularly as mothers. Sometimes, they have drawn upon their political commitments to justice and equality, as Leftists of one stripe or another, or as feminists. At other times, they have drawn upon their religious faith, as Quakers do, when launching their critique of militarism. Whatever the motivation and, in particular, the source of solidarity they provide, however, such links can never be taken for granted. They will always need to be carefully presented, if we are to strengthen opposition to what many now see as the inevitability of rising militarism all around us. In sites of conflict, especially that involving our own side or occurring on our doorstep, most of us, most of the time, prefer to look away or to rationalize the situation, hence avoiding having to take any explicit stance on their complicity with institutionised violence: 'the ability to deny is an amazingly human phenomenon ... a product of the sheer complexity of our emotional, linguistic, moral and intellectual lives', as Stanley Cohen illustrates so well in his work on the topic (Cohen, 2001, p.50).

From where I am currently placed, as a Left feminist of Jewish background, some of the most thoughtful arguments drawing out links between existing gender hierarchies, militarism and the gruesome outcomes of war, come from some feminists I am closest to in the zone of conflict I have been engaged with of late. These are just a few of the women organizing in Israel for an end to the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, as part of the much broader women's peace movement in that county. I know something of their perspective and ways of working, which I intend to discuss here. I have also met the most impressive Palestinian women and men, who are not only living with the brutalities of

occupation, but have very publicly opposed any Palestinian violence committed against Israeli civilians. These Palestinian spokespeople, whose voices we so rarely hear, are mostly dismayed, though hardly surprised, by the gradual rise of fundamentalism amongst their increasingly desperate, despairing and abused communities. They can be found in diverse Palestinian enclaves, from the Jerusalem Women's Center, the Bethlehem Peace Center and numerous other local initiatives, to the various initiatives for global dialogue and democracy, including Voice of the People and MIFTAH. I have listened in tears to resolute Palestinian peace campaigners, such as Islah Jad, Lily Fiedy, Reema Hammami, Eyad Saraj, Salim Tamari, to name only those associated with the few Palestinian peace forums I have been able to attend, including the one I am involved with, Faculty for Israeli and Palestinian Peace International (FFIPPI). However, the knowledge I have of Palestinian structures and frameworks is insufficient for me to do any justice to their language and practices of struggle, so I must refer you to those who know more (Sabbagh, 1988; Jad et.al. 2000; Hammami and Tamari, 2001). Here, in presenting the thoughts of some Jewish Israeli women thinking through the links they see between gender and militarism in their homeland, I am in no way trying to provide an overview – let alone a solution – to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but thoughts on something far more specific to my theme of questioning the links between gender and militarism.

The particular peace activists whose outlook and tactics I know best are women who helped found New Profile, an Israeli feminist, anti-militarist organization formed in 1998, in conditions I describe below. New Profile's stated goal is to 'civil-ize' Israeli society, seeking conflict resolution without resort to violence. However, they are all too well aware of the forces they confront, since Israel is not only one of the most highly militarized societies in the world, but one of only two countries that insists upon mandatory conscription for women. This is sometimes presented as an expression of women's equality in Israel, but New Profile believes that the military nature of Israeli society works to

preserve both racism and sexism in a society that has been mostly run by ex-army men, one which prioritizes its military might above all else, extolling women's role as primarily breeders of future Jewish soldiers for the nation. One of the initiators and leading voices of New Profile, the peace activist and writer, Rela Mazali, has repeatedly reported upon the role of the Israeli media and educational programmes and curricula in disciplining and controlling the consciousness, habits and bodies of Jewish boys and men, urged to look and act always 'in ways associated with soldierhood': images of the cropped-haired, handsome, sexy, masculine man, identifiable as a soldier are ubiquitous, from advertising to books and television (Mazali, 1995). In contrast, though they may serve in the army, girls and women are primarily expected to admire, create and preserve this soldier culture, above all, in their role as mothers. Writing of the days when she had only one child, another founder of New Profile, Mirjam Hadar, recalls the stream of criticism she experienced, from the women as much as from the men around her: 'There was for instance the playschool teacher who took me to task, one morning, loudly, vulgarly, in full view and earshot of my son and several of his friends, about "being a lazy woman" for not having made another child, while the first one, after all, was already five years old' (Hadar, unpublished). Most immediately, however, the women I know from New Profile are concerned to put an end to what they see as their country's appalling abuse of military power in their continued control over Palestinians in the Occupied Territory, in particular their swift ratcheting up of violence in the face of any and all provocation and (ongoing as I write in mid-2007) in the Israeli blockade and siege of the Gaza Strip.

### **Israeli Women's Peace Activism**

'Most people don't want to hear about my shame', Rela Mazali writes, 'as I witness, and fail to stop, the catastrophe that Israel has been bringing about in the Gaza Strip ... I can see them recoil as I name it, as if it is my act of exposure that is shameful, rather than the actions causing my shame'. This statement comes from a speech she sends me, the text of

one of the many talks she gave in the USA, Israel's prodigious financial and military sponsor, to the tune of three and a half billion annually. She was touring there in late 2006, with Ghada Ageel, from the Khan Yunes refugee camp in Gaza. They were highlighting the tragic effects of the continuing Israeli siege on Gaza, keeping its borders largely sealed to the movement of people, funds, raw materials, exports, or even medical supplies for the sick and dying. Mazali and Ageel both spoke of their involvement in the campaign to end the siege. I live between hope and despair, my particular Israeli friends often said, or words to that effect, but for years now despair has all but eclipsed their hope. There have simply been so few signs of progress. Indeed, there has been the opposite.

Hazy hopes had surfaced for a few years around the Oslo Peace Accords of 1993. However, before long the continuing lack of progress towards any Israeli withdrawal back to the internationally agreed 1967 borders, the resumption of land seizures and illegal settlements on Palestinian territory, accompanying the ongoing wretchedness and subjugation of millions of Palestinians living under occupation, stifled Palestinian hopes. The visit of Ariel Sharon (the leader of the then non-ruling Likud Party) to the sacred site of the Al-Aqsa Mosque in 2000, accompanied by hundreds of Israeli riot police, provided the trigger for the second Palestinian intifada. Initially involving unarmed confrontations between Palestinian men and boys demonstrating against Israeli soldiers and tanks at checkpoints, it soon escalated into intensified if highly unequal violence on both sides with the election of Ariel Sharon as Prime Minister of Israel in 2001. His election marked the definitive collapse of the more peaceful Oslo period, since Sharon was not only one of the most notorious of Israel's military hawks, the man who had both commanded Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982 and been responsible for allowing massacres to occur at the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps, but also the man who had from the beginning fiercely opposed the peace Accords and encouraged the continued seizure of ever more Palestinian land for Israeli settlements – always strategically sited on hilltops.

It was in this worsening political climate that women in New Profile decided to instigate their policy of 'Refusal' in recent years. 'Refusal', as Mirjam Hadar spells out, 'is specifically refusal to participate directly in, or otherwise support indirectly, the Israeli army's occupation and oppression of the Palestinian populations of the West Bank and Gaza Strip' (Hadar, unpub). New Profile had itself grown out of the work of two Israeli feminist study groups focusing upon the state of women living in their own uniquely militarised society. New Profile's work has thus from the beginning highlighted the connection between gender and militarism, with the original group of older feminists soon joined by a number of younger women, and some men. They research and write about the costs of the militarized nature of Israeli society, exposing the links between militarism and violence against women, monitoring the military mythology that enters the media and educational curriculum, organizing youth groups and summer camps, creating traveling exhibitions and, aligned with the Israeli Coalition of Women for Peace and the wider women's peace movement internationally, speak out on any platforms they can use in the service of peace. Militarism, they argue, not only generates its own intensely regressive gender dynamics, with its potent hierarchies and bullying machismo, solidified around conquest, duty and service, but remains at odds with any resolute commitments to finding peaceful solutions to the enduring historical conflict between Israel and the Palestinians.

A part of New Profile's agenda has been to offer very general advice, support and education services for all young people, and their families, who have doubts about joining, or not joining, the military services, whether or not they wish to make a public political stance, associating themselves with the Refusenik movement. Various Refusenik protest groups re-surfaced in Israel after Sharon's huge escalation of military activity in the occupied territory, especially after the Israeli assault on several Palestinian cities in 2002, which reduced Jenin to rubble (following a number of horrifying Palestinian suicide

bombings of Israeli civilians). These groups included Courage to Refuse, reserve officers and soldiers from the ‘heart of the IDF’ who published the Combatant's Letter in January 2002, and Air Force Pilots, the 27 reserve pilots who signed a letter declaring their refusal to take part in aerial attacks on populated Palestinian areas in the territories. However, such groups in no way support New Profile’s more general anti-militarist stance. Most recently, in another interesting development, Combatants for Peace was formed in April 2006, consisting of both former Israeli and Palestinian fighters, now wanting to lay down their arms and work only to end the cycle of violence between their two peoples. (New Profile, 2006)

Unsurprisingly, the first Israeli to connect her refusal directly with a feminist anti-militarist stance was a young member of New Profile, Idan Halili. In her petition for exemption from service in November, 2005, Halili argued that the military promotes sexual harassment, a patriarchal power structure, and conformity to ‘masculine’ roles. She ‘won’ her case, in the sense that, after spending two weeks in prison, she was declared ‘unfit to serve’. Gaining widespread media attention for her stance, Halili explained in a subsequent interview with another very active Israeli refusnik, Rotem Mor:

At first I thought that I could enter the Army in a position aligned with my feminist principles. I wanted to find a place where I could deal with sexual abuse and harassment within the Army. As I looked into it more, I began to understand ... [that] even if I was working on issues of harassment and feminism within the Army, I wouldn't be able to make much of a difference. ... It was also important for me to raise issues of feminism *inside* the refusal movement because refusal is not always a feminist action. For example, male refusers who go to jail repeatedly are hailed as heroes. Thus we replace the soldier-hero with the refuser-hero... I think that I wouldn't have been able to do this—gain exposure in the press and experience the personal difficulty of refusal—without New Profile. Having the support of the organization was very important.

New Profile is thus distinctive in its emphasis on sound feminist reasons for supporting those who refuse to serve in the army, whether or not those large number of Israelis now managing to avoid military service choose to join the official Israeli ‘Refuseniks’, now over

one and a half thousand strong (although dwindling of late, Galili, 2005) who refuse to serve in the Occupied Territory, beyond Israel's agreed 1967 borders.

The feminist message of these particular Israeli peace-makers is thus not only their passionate condemnation of the devastation Israel's continued military expansion brings to Palestinians, but its destructive effects on its own citizens. They point out that, as in the US army, studies suggest that eighty per cent of Israeli women soldiers say they have experienced some form of sexual harassment, with little public or official concern (Mazali, 2003). Feminist research also highlights the very permeable boundaries between the military and the civil society in Israel, indicating the significantly higher percentage of women murdered or beaten by male partners serving in the IDF (Madelaine Adelman, 2003). Meanwhile, the high rates of suicide and stress experienced by Israeli boys and men in the IDF also go unreported. It is only reading Mazali that I learn that during the years preceding Israel's most recent war in Lebanon, 'the number one cause of deaths among Israeli soldiers was suicide, and large numbers of veterans are disabled by depression and drug abuse'. Over a decade ago, Mazali was already protesting about the medical profession's suppression of the high incidence rates of post-traumatic stress disorder among troops, but with little response (Mazali, 1995). Directly and indirectly, continued militarization has been destructive for Israeli society, its ever-escalating military spending leading to slashes in social budgets, which increases the numbers living in poverty. However, what is most maddening for Israeli peace activists is that to this day, even while pretending to be in favour of peace, Israel continues to allow the confiscation and settlement of Palestinian land, most recently the invasion of forty acres near Hebron, with the resulting IDF drafted in to protect this new confiscation, closing down shops and activity in the centre of Hebron. As throughout the West Bank, each new checkpoint continues to destroy the economy and fabric of Palestinian life, just as the cement walls and barbed wire of the Israeli 'Security Fence' now cutting into Palestinian territory both separates Palestinians from each other and, not infrequently, from their sources of

livelihood. For Israelis, as the outgoing UN Special Coordinator, General Alvaro de Soto affirmed, before retiring in 2007, the Wall operates as a 'barrier of denial' of the humanitarian disaster the occupation creates in the territories (quoted in Eldar, 2007).

Over the last decade a general paralysis appears to have descended on much of the broader Israeli peace movement, following Israel's continuing to use of its military might as first resort. This was evident most recently with the extended bombing of Lebanese cities following Israel's invasion and resort to war in the summer of 2006, initially in response to border skirmishes with Hezbollah. In the face of such military escalation, alongside fears of continued Palestinian retaliation against Israeli civilians, one of Israel's largest blocs, Peace Now, has been only sporadically active since 2000. Notwithstanding the grim failure to achieve its goals, however, the Israeli women's peace groups have often proved the most resolute in their refusal to accept the seeming inevitability of conflict. These groups include: Bat Shalom (Daughters of Peace), MACHSOM WATCH (women monitoring soldiers' conduct at checkpoints), Women's Interfaith Encounter, Women in Black, Women Against The Wall, Women and Mothers for Peace (formerly Four Mothers), Women's Coalition for Peace and B'tselem, a highly active campaign combating human rights abuses in the territories, which is led and mainly staffed by women peace activists.

Sometimes, it is simply as individuals that Israeli women, and men, have dared to stare unblinkingly at and report on the brutal face of Israel's continuing occupation and enclosure of Palestinian land. Few have observed and contested the effects of occupation as courageously as Amira Hass, the only Israeli journalist living in the Occupied Territories, and the daughter of two Holocaust survivors who, from their first arrival in Israel as refugees from Europe after Hitler's defeat, refused to condone the dispossession of the Palestinians. Hass lived in Gaza between 1993 and 1997 for exactly that reason: 'In the end,' she wrote, 'my desire to live in Gaza stemmed neither from adventurism nor from

insanity, but from that dread of being a bystander'. She was determined to understand what had become of those dispossessed Palestinians: 'To me, Gaza embodies the entire saga of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; it represents the central contradiction of the state of Israel – democracy for some, dispossession for others; it is our exposed nerve' (Hass, 1999, p.3,). Hass went on to make her home in Ramallah, in the West Bank, and for well over a decade has daily recorded the routine brutality that inevitably accompanies the work of those who constitute the bored and frightened recruits of Israel's occupying army, known as the Israeli Defence Force (IDF). Her dispatches, with their devastating details of arbitrary arrests, beatings, torture, and routine sadistic humiliations of Palestinians at check-points (the West Bank is plagued with over 500 checkpoints and roadblocks, denying freedom of movement to its inhabitants), appear regularly in Israel's liberal daily, *Ha'aretz*.

However, Hass is well aware that few Israeli' citizens read her words, and if they do, they somehow manage to find ways of dismissing them by pointing to Palestinian resistance: 'People turn to bio-religious explanations, not socio-historical ones' (Hass, 2003, pp. 173-4) This is exactly what the British born, American political journalist Lesley Hazleton found on speaking with her apparently peace-loving, liberal Israeli friends. 'Did you read Amira Hass today?', she would ask them, and they would reply with words like 'Oh no, I can't stand reading her any more. I don't want to know. It's too much already. Whatever we're doing to the Palestinians, they've called it upon themselves' (Hazleton, 2004). Hazleton suggests that these Israeli's seemed battered not only by a genuine fear of Palestinian reprisals, especially suicide bombs, but by their sense of hopelessness that there was nothing they could do to stop the escalation of violence. Standing firm against that collective disavowal is the enduring cultural context for that small but determined Israeli minority who obstinately refuse to disregard the injuries and injustices perpetrated by those who represent them. The year 2006 closed with an editorial in the liberal daily, *Ha'aretz*, affirming: 'Virtually not a week goes by without a new revelation, each more sensational

and revolting than the previous one, about the building spree in West Bank settlements, in blatant violation of the law and in complete contradiction to official government policy' (31st Dec 2006). 'Revolting' revelations; but only the minority revolts. Dissenters are seldom welcomed, and while gendered, feminist, political or religious attachments help some people to maintain pockets of resistance, in Israel, as elsewhere, it can be a difficult stance to preserve.

### **Beyond Gender Contrasts to Shared Vulnerabilities**

Whether in Israel, or anywhere else, there have always been peace campaigns led by men, alongside historical evidence of the courage of individual men conscientiously refusing to kill or injure their alleged enemies. However, many feminists have suggested that women's peace movements have often proved the most open, creative and enduring. Certainly, this is the view of Cynthia Cockburn, one of Britain's best-known peace and disarmament activists, who has been involved in women's anti-war movement since opposing nuclear missiles at Greenham Common in the 1980s. With the rising ethnic conflicts of the 1990s Cockburn began studying the situation of women on either sides of such conflict, beginning in Ireland, later extending her work to conflict situations around the globe, in Cyprus, South America, Bosnia, Turkey, Africa, India, Israel, Palestine and other countries in the Middle East. Always, she was attentive to women reaching out to each other across lines of division and conflict, just as the women in *New Profile* and others have tried to do in Israel and Palestine (Cockburn, 1998; Cockburn, 2004). Having now spent decades studying the lives of women who are enmeshed in, surviving or confronting war around the globe, Cockburn suggests that not only are women always the major peace makers, but that they often prefer to organize in women only groups. Her latest book, *From Where We Stand: War, Women's Activism and Feminist Analysis*, is a vivid account of the way in which certain women have been able to bring ethnicity and gender into the same hierarchical frame, objecting to the artificial divisions that are made between women across ethnic lines,

as well as between women and men across gender lines (Cockburn, 2007).

Not all women are peacemakers, nor are all feminists pacifists. Yet Cockburn is surely right to suggest that a gender analysis is a useful, perhaps indeed, as she suggests, even an ‘indispensable’ tool for critiquing militarism and its endless cycles of war, at least in the world as we have known it. Both the rhetorics of domination, and the training in the uses of coercion necessary for producing military cadres, still connect us almost immediately with images of men and masculinity. It is men who are associated with all that is tough, assertive, stoical, obedient, heroic. Moreover, men’s traditional monopoly of institutionalized force, whether in the military or the police, has helped secure men’s dominance both over women, as well as securing existing hierarchies between nations and differing classes and ethnic groups. Building upon feminism and gender theory, a few historians have recently begun exploring the role of notions of masculinity in modern warfare. Some scholars, including John Tosh, point out that military values have often served to justify and enforce male dominance: ‘During the era of the New Imperialism in late nineteenth-century Britain, the partial militarization of hegemonic masculinity served to bolster the indispensability of manly attributes at a time when women’s educational and social advances appeared to pose a challenge to traditional patriarchal assumptions.’ Nevertheless, Tosh hastens to add that the ‘patriarchal dividend’, or gender privilege, was just one of the power dynamics upheld by military manliness, the burden of which placed so many young men in danger of serious injury and death (Tosh, 2004, p.55). [[It was seeing the price men paid, and wanting to share their feminist critique of militarism, that led New Profile to allow men to join their organization and work alongside them.]]

Reflecting some of the conflicts of the late-nineteenth century, the global inequalities that deepened at the close of the twentieth have resulted in a constant resort to violence and ongoing destabilization within poorer nations. The consequent displacement of millions of

people has consolidated a ruthless strengthening of state powers and national borders, attempting to keep out those seeking asylum in richer Western nations. Meanwhile, in this fin-de-siècle, as in the last, the power of virile metaphor remains the ubiquitous accompaniment of states of war and spreading militarization. Interpreting the horror of the destruction of the Twin Towers in New York, on September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001, reaction everywhere played upon images of the event as the consummate symbolic emasculation of America's phallic power. As commentators from both the Islamic and Western world have noted, the spectacular 'triumph' of that event was adroitly staged both to assuage the sense of inferiority and injustice of a deeply divided Muslim world, as well as to ignite its anger against the US-Western military onslaught certain to follow. Western hawks all-too-quickly became fundamentalism's willing allies, staging their own ruthless retaliation. These are mighty forces to confront for those of us trying to undermine the binding of masculinity to acts of dominance and violence. Launching his 'war on terrorism', George W. Bush often presented himself in army uniform, strutting an invincible American masculinity: 'Your man has got *cojones*', he apparently said of the then British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, after the Camp David meeting where Blair had agreed to back him all the way in war against Iraq (Quoted in Woodward, 2004, p.178).

Feminist arguments against such machismo form part of the struggle against militarism, even though those arguments are contingent upon current gender practices which are not, as I see it, ineluctable. For over thirty years, no one has been more sensitively attuned to the significance of the 'masculinist' postures and practices of warfare, and the situation of women caught up in them, than the American feminist, Cynthia Enloe (Enloe, 1988; 2000; 2004). It is the ongoing militarization of societies that helps explain why men's violence against women is still increasing around the world, along with the rapid growth in the sexual trafficking of women (See Breines, et. al. 2000). UNESCO, has recently declared violence against women, a 'global epidemic' of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, reaching

immeasurable levels of brutality and cruelty in many situations of conflict (Human Rights Watch World Report 2006). Around the world, the various NGOs monitoring human rights have been reporting that in almost all places where armies invade, and national or ethnic conflict occurs, domestic violence increases rapidly, both during and after hostilities, as a direct effect of militaristic cultures, alongside the strains, displacements and traumas of war (United Nations OCHA/IRIN, 2007).

However, what most feminists, at least up until now, have said less about is the ways in which men too are the constant victims of the violence of other men, overwhelmingly so in times of conflict, when men are also more likely to suffer sexual humiliation, rape and all other forms of bodily fragmentation and abuse. Men too have tended to remain silent about such bodily disintegration and personal trauma. The Canadian academic Adam Jones is one observer of wars and genocide who does stress the importance of a broader gender frame in studying the causes and effects of conflict, including the gendered targeting of men, both as the anticipated perpetrators and the constant victims in the staging of violence. The demonization of out-group males was a key feature of the propaganda discourse instigating the three classic genocides of the twentieth century, of Armenians in Turkey, Jews in Europe and the Tutsis of Rwanda (Jones, 2004, p.2). In the most recent atrocities in Rwanda, for instance, Jones emphasizes the inordinate stress placed upon maintaining traditional masculine gender roles stemming from years of economic crisis and resource scarcity, with young Hutu boys and men systematically targeted to focus their anger on the Tutsi menace (Jones, 2004, pp.98-99).

Clearly, it is not only in sensational atrocities, from genocide to the torture of prisoners in Abu-Graub, or the indefinite detention of Islamic captives in Guantanamo Bay, that we need to ponder the ways in which men suffer hideously, primarily at the hands of their fellow men. Men become victims all the time, whether in schoolyards, workplaces, football

terraces, prisons or battlefields (Segal, 2007). Traditionally, we have been encouraged to think that there is some natural bond between men and violence, simply given full reign in times of war. This perspective is fully endorsed today through the resurgence of social Darwinism in evolutionary psychology, as seen in Thornhill and Palmer's reckless speculations in their *Natural History of Rape* (Thornhill and Palmer, 2000). Critical as many feminist thinkers have been of such biological reductionism, some – in the footsteps of radical feminists such as Susan Brownmiller, Andrea Dworkin or Catharine MacKinnon – have tended to offer their own form of cultural reductionism, suggesting a necessary link between formations of masculinity and sexual violence as the necessary site for inscribing male dominance (Brownmiller, 1975; Dworkin, 1997; Mackinnon, 1987).

However, this analysis is in my view quite as unhelpful as the talk of biological compulsions, for men are neither all rapists, nor all violent, in any significant sense. According to the radical feminist outlook, as British historian Joanna Bourke suggests, all men are rapists, rape fantasists or beneficiaries of rape. Yet, 'the penis', as she rather quaintly says, 'is a deeply flawed instrument of power', with its own peculiar vulnerabilities, often arousing quite unbearable anxiety (Bourke, forthcoming). It is important to understand the increased sexual torture of women in times of war, but equally important to see the prevalent sadistic torture of men that is being encouraged in military conquest today. Moreover, against classical feminist conceptions, we need to realize that women too, ever more needed today in the grubby business of war, have also been involved in the sexual torture of prisoners. Moreover, in ways that hardly anybody wishes to acknowledge, women's engagement in violence and sadism is clearly not just a footnote to men's orders. Women are nowadays visible, as they have been before, enacting their own particular ways of humiliating men. There *is* a gendered story in play, but it does not simply reduce to a male/female, terrorizer and victim scenario, as women join men in the work of objectifying and psychologically annihilating the 'enemy', finding ways to 'effeminize'

him, if he is a man.

As Bourke argues, the point to note is that there is always a very *particular* story to tell about violence, specific to its own time and place, including the ambiguities of its gendered dynamics. Such stories are never merely the operation of universal truths or inevitabilities, whether seen as biological, cultural or psychological. I can easily imagine more androgynous combat units in the very near future, which might well deploy women and men equally in operating the latest technologies of warfare. In my view, what we need to stress is that in military combat men actually experience fear, trauma and bodily shattering, much like a woman, which is why so much work goes into denying this. As Judith Butler argues in *Precarious Lives*, we should begin with the premise that all human bodies are fundamentally dependent and vulnerable. Our common condition is precisely this shared helplessness, which is as evident in the susceptibility of our desires and attachments to rejection and loss, as in our enduring physical injurability (Butler, 2004). Studying, and yet also attempting to undo, the cultural mythologies of gender is another way in which feminists need to think and argue counter-intuitively when addressing the topic of gender, war and militarism. Few tasks are more critical, which is what has led New Profile to allow men to join their feminist organization and to work alongside them against militarism in Israel.

## **AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY**

Lynne Segal is Anniversary Professor of Psychology and Gender Studies at Birkbeck College, London University. Her books include *Is the Future Female? Troubled Thoughts on Contemporary Feminism*; *Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities, Changing Men*; *Straight Sex: The Politics of Pleasure*; *Why Feminism? Gender, Psychology, Politics*. Her latest book is *Making Trouble: Life and Politics* (Serpent's Tail, 2007).

## **REFERENCES**

ADELMAN, Madelaine (2003) 'The Military, Militarism, and the Militarization of Domestic Violence', *Violence Against Women*, Vol. 9, No. 9, 1118-1152

BENEDICT, Helen 'The private war of women soldiers', in *Salon*, [http://www.salon.com/news/feature/2007/03/07/women\\_in\\_military](http://www.salon.com/news/feature/2007/03/07/women_in_military).

Bourke, Joanna. *Rape: A Cultural History*. London: Virago (forthcoming, Virago Press)

BREINES, Ingeborg, CONNELL, Robert and EIDE, Ingrid eds. (2004) *Male Roles, Masculinities and Violence: A Culture of Peace Perspective*, Paris, UNESCO.

BRITAIN, Vera *Testament of Youth*, London, Virago, 1978, p.291-2.

BROWNMILLER, Susan (1975) *Against Our Will*, New York, Simon and Schuster in 1975.

BUTLER, Judith (2004) *Precarious Life: The Power of Mourning and Violence*, London, Verso.

COCKBURN, Cynthia (1998) *The Space Between Us: Negotiating gender and National Identities in Conflict*, London, Zed Press.

COCKBURN, Cynthia (2004) *The Line: Women, partition and the gender Order in Cyprus*, London, Zed Press.

COCKBURN, Cynthia (2007) *From Where We Stand: War, Women's Activism and Feminist Analysis*, London, Zed Press.

COHEN, Stanley (2001) *States of Denial: Knowing about Atrocities and Suffering*, Oxford: Polity Press.

DWORKIN, Andrea (1997), *Life and Death: Unapologetic Writings on the Continuing War Against Women*

ENLOE, Cynthia (2004) *The Curious Feminist: Searching for Women in The New Age of Empire*, University of California Press

ENLOE, Cynthia (1988) *Does Khaki Become You? The Militarization of Women's Lives*, London, Pandora Press .

ENLOE, Cynthia (2000) *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*. Berkely, University of California Press

ENLOE, Cynthia (2004) *The Curious Feminist: Searching for Women in The New Age of Empire*, University of California Press.

GALILI, Lily (2005) 'Left-Wing Refusenik Movement Shuts Down, *Haaretz*, July 31, 2005, [www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/606885.html](http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/606885.html)

GILBERT, Sandra (1983) 'Soldier's Heart: Literary Men, Literary Women, and the Great War, *Signs*, Vol. 8, no 3, 422-50.

HADAR, Mirjam (2004, unpub), 'Women in Israel, Militarization and the Refusal to Serve/Enlist', circulated to friends, available from the author, Tel-Aviv University.

HASS, Amira (1999) *Drinking the Sea at Gaza: Days and Nights Under Siege*, New York, Owl Books.

HASS, Amira (2003) *Reporting from Ramallah: An Israeli Journalist in an Occupied Land*, edited and translated by Rachel Leah Jones, Los Angeles: semiotext(e), 2003.

HAZLETON, Lesley (2004), 'Reporting in the flesh', *The Women's Review of Books*, vol. Xx1, no. 8, p.14.

HAMMAM1, Rema and TAMARI, Salim (2001) 'The second uprising: End or new beginning? *Journal of Palestinian Studies*, xxx, No 2, pp.5-25.

JAD, Islah, Johnson, Penny and GIACAMAN, Ritsa (2000) 'Transit citizens: gender and citizenship under the Palestinian authority in SUAD, Joseph (2000) editor, *Gender and Citizenship in the Middle east*, Syracuse, Syracuse University Press.

JONES, Adam ed. (2004), *Gendercide and Genocide*, Vanderbilt

University Press,

KARPINSKI, Janis (2005) *One Woman's Army: The Commanding General of Abu Ghraib Tells Her Story*, Mirimax Books.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER FOR THE PEOPLE AND THE PRESS, 'War Concerns Grow, But Support Remains Steadfast', Released: April 3, 2003, <http://people-press.org/accessed> 11 May 2007.

MACKINNON, Catharine A (1987) *Feminism Unmodified: Discourses on Life and Law*, Harvard University Press.

MAZALI, Rela (1995) 'Raising boys to maintain armies', *BMJ* 311: 694, 9 September.

MAZALI, Rela (2003) 'And what about the girls?': What a culture of war genders out of view', *Nashim: A journal of Jewish Women's Gender Issues*, Number 6, Fall 5764/2003

MOR, Rotem, (2007) 'Feminism & Military Refusal: Seeking a Society Based on Equality & Dignity', <http://www.afsc.org/israel-palestine/Halili-Interview.html>, as retrieved on 8 November, 2007.

NEW PROFILE (2006), *Annual Report*, [http://coalitionofwomen.org/home/organizations/new\\_profile/new\\_profile\\_annual\\_report](http://coalitionofwomen.org/home/organizations/new_profile/new_profile_annual_report)

PEW RESEARCH CENTER FOR THE PEOPLE AND THE PRESS, 'War Concerns Grow, But Support Remains Steadfast', Released: April 3, 2003, <http://people-press.org/accessed> 11 May 2007.

SABBAGH, Suha ed. (1998) *Palestinian Women of Gaza and the West Bank*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press

SEGAL, Lynne (1987) *Is the Future Female*, London, Virago Press.

SEGAL, Lynne (2007) 'Men After Feminism: What's Left to Say?', new introduction to *Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities, Changing Men*, London, Palgrave, 2007.

THORNHILL, Randy and PALMER, Craig T. (2000). *A Natural History of Rape: Biological Bases of Sexual Coercion*, Cambridge and London, MIT Press

TOSH, John (2004), 'hegemonic Masculinity and Gender History' in, Stefan Dudink, Karen Hagemann and John Tosh, eds., *Masculinities in Politics and War: Gendering Modern History*, Manchester, Manchester University Press.

Bob Woodward, 2004, *Plan of Attack*, New York, Simon and Schuster, 2004

United Nations (2007) *The Shame of War: Sexual Violence Against Women and Girls in Conflict*, <http://www.irinnews.org/pdf/sow/IRIN-TheShameofWar-fullreport-Mar07.pdf>.

WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH WORLD REPORT (2006), <http://hrw.org/podcast/wr2k6pod.xml>; *Women, Gender, and Human Rights*, New Jersey, Rutgers University Press, 2001