

JPM718: Presentation Handout

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Reading's Title: Wilcox, Lauren. 2009. Gendering the Cult of the Offensive

1. Summary of the Reading

What is the reading about? What is the author's main thesis and conclusions?

The articles I am about to try and compare are Lauren Wilcox's publication of her Chapter 4. named 'Gendering the Cult of the Offensive' (2009) towards Carol Cohn's and Cynthia Enloe's publication titled 'A Conversation with Cynthia Enloe: Feminists Look at Masculinity and the Men Who Wage War' (2003). To say a little bit about Wilcox in general: she is a professor of Gender Studies in Cambridge, a researcher of political violence, subjectivity and also embodiment from the perspective of feminist and queer theories. The main idea behind Wilcox's article is exploring the topic that has been of prolonging interest to traditional scholars specifying in the Security Studies, which is the so called offense-defence balance. To easily describe Wilcox's point of view of her offense-defence theory would be to claim that in International Security Studies, wars are more likely to happen when offensive military strategies as well as technologies are at a specific relative advantage over defensive strategies and technologies being put to use. She argues that the offense-defence balance influences the chance of war when affecting the security dilemma. Her theory of offense-defence claims that a misperceived offensive domination has been a significant cause of plenty of conflicts. We can see that happening on examples of subordinate masculinity that made e.g. France, the U.S., or Britain to engage in combat in WWI which was mostly caused because of Germany's barbarism. She connects such barbarism with the fact that men are usually more likely to fight than women and are more aggressive by nature. Wars happen because men happen to be in position of political, economic, and military power – I understand that as men are in positions to be able to use soft and hard power policies. One of the main questions of her work is – why such barbarism? She tries to demonstrate how gender might be relevant in constituting the barbarism ideas and shows 3 paths how gender may explain her 'cult of the offensive' -> 1st - the gendered perceptions of technology, 2nd – gendered nationalism, 3rd – definitions of citizens and honour based on the gendered concept of protection. She indicates, that maybe, feminists in IR see military training and the installation of martial values in males as a source of aggressive policies. She mentions 3 areas of investigation about how gender can constitute the missing link in the explanation of the misperception of theorists who say that the offense-defence balance's technology and military doctrine play a big part in state's perception of 'the cult of the offensive'. Firstly, it is that the uses of technology depend upon gendered ideologies which heartened terrible and destructive strategies in WWI. Secondly, the concept of gender is an inherent part of nationalism which promotes offensive policies by describing masculinity as a heroic service to the nation. Lastly, gendered discourses of protection tend to use defensive language to legitimate offensive policies.

2. Critical Analysis

What are the strong and weak points of the argument?

To my mind, it seems that Wilcox has many good points and her analysis definitely stems from thorough researches. Further empirical studies would be useful to increase the understanding of specific ways in which gender discourses and gender identities contribute to (or contradict) other explanations for the causes of war. By explaining the impact gender has on issues related to the perception of offense-defense balance, her feminist analysis shows how the production of gender identities is not confined to individuals and the private realm but rather could be a pervasive fact of social life on an international scale. The way I see it, international relations theorists concerned with determining the causes of war would do well to consider the ways in which gender can shape the conditions under which wars occur. In my opinion, one of the weaker points of Wilcox is that instead of observing the relationship between nationalism and the enrichment of specific gender identities as

a circumstance of coincidence, she (among other feminists) theorise about the ways how national identity is produced in general. Maybe she puts too much pressure on how gender symbolism describes the way of how masculinity and femininity are allocated to different dichotomies organising the 'Western thinking'. On the other hand, she may be right about how these gender stereotypes are ingrained in Western cultures and define the male/female breach in many different areas of life.

3. Relation to the Main Reading

How does the argument relate to, and/or expand the argument of the main reading to which it is linked in the syllabus?

To briefly summarise Carol Cohn's and Cynthia Enloe's publication titled 'A Conversation with Cynthia Enloe: Feminists Look at Masculinity and the Men Who Wage War (2003)', the main purpose of the article was to highlight how the dominance of masculine characteristics in policy making preserves militarisation. That fact, in turn, maintains forceful and war-leaning order-of-business in the U.S. They mention organisations such as WTO, the World bank, the UN etc... Most parts of their conversation is about the aftermath of September 2001 attacks on world politics and whether the event itself has masculinised IR further. To try and summarise both articles whilst joining a side might be pretty hard as both have their relevant point of view. However, their points of view are quite similar in the sense of the Western world. They say that we live in a world where American military policy conveys more clout which is disproportionate and has never been seen in history as such yet. On the positive note, they agree we are now living in a feminist world and women are more than ever conscious (speaking of the United States, not all parts of the world). The similarity can also be found in how gender relations are embedded in international relations. Wilcox wisely tries to prove a point of a pedestal upon which white women stand, that is constantly being fortified by an equal sacred white masculinity described as a distorted presumption of honour, a whim for violence just as well as the so called male 'righteousness & supremacy'. What I strongly believe is the idea of Wilcox that gender is a very relational conceptualisation and therefore, hegemonic definitions of what being masculine means are by rule entailed with hegemonic definitions of femininity. Wilcox's analysis really shows how gender discourses and identities are not limited to individuals and the private world. Instead, they are rather an omnipresent reality of social life on an international measure. The main difference to me is that the A article does not really define what the concept of 'masculinity' is and risks jeopardising male traits. Although, both articles exemplify the huge difference between feminism and misandry. Cohn & Enloe nicely explain how it is not men that feminism emancipates itself from but their so called 'never changing status-quo'.