

Women and War: Feminist Approaches to War and Violence

Temple University (in person at Charles Library 401, and online)

November 11-12, 2022

The entire event will be available live via Zoom. Please click on the link to view webpage and scroll down to register and receive a link.

<http://challengingwar.com/fall-2022/>

Keynote Speakers

Nancy Sherman (via Zoom)

Professor of Philosophy, Georgetown University

“Is Military Stoicism Actually Stoicism?”

In this talk, I critique the macho “suck it up” culture of the modern military with a corrective from ancient Greco-Roman Stoicism. That corrective includes lessons from Marcus Aurelius, himself an emperor, but also supreme Roman military commander who insisted that Stoicism is, at its core, a philosophy not of self-reliance, but of social connectedness, and so, vulnerability to love and loss.

Laura Sjoberg (via Zoom)

British Academy Global Professor of Politics and International Relations, Royal Holloway University of London

“Kill the Women First? Gender and the Impossible Civilian”

Traditional narratives suggest that killing civilians intentionally in wars happens infrequently and that the perpetration of civilian targeting is limited to aberrant actors. Recently, scholars have shown that both state and non-state actors target civilians, even while explicitly deferring to the civilian immunity principle. I fill a gap in the accounts of how civilian targeting happens and shows that these actors are in large part targeting women rather than some gender-neutral understanding of civilians. I argue that gender is key to how war-fighting actors understand both themselves and their opponents and therefore plays a role in shaping strategic and tactical choices. Building on this argument, I suggest that gendered notions of the civilian are *permissive*, rather than restraining, in the logics of war legitimation.

The philosophical discourse around questions of war has tended to approach war from the perspective of states, political leaders, and soldiers. These perspectives are often treated as objective, universal, or neutral points of view. However, given the reality of gender inequality in the social, political, and legal spheres, these “objective” perspectives have tended to focus our attention on the experiences and concerns of men. What has been kept hidden from view are the unique ways in which war affects women. This conference seeks to challenge the dominant frameworks of war by bringing to the fore feminist and other alternative approaches (e.g., critical race, queer theoretic, decolonial) to questions of war.

Participants:

Margaret Betz (Rutgers Camden) “Fight Like a Girl: Women and Resistance Violence”

Traditionally, violence and aggression tend to be viewed as gendered in that they are largely understood as not only masculine behaviors, but also as solely the privilege of men (i.e., it is viewed as culturally more acceptable for men to express their anger through violence than it is for women). Yet, women throughout history have overcome this gendered norm and have used violence to resist their exploitation and dehumanization. This paper explores what is meant by resistance violence and its expression through an enslaved woman named Celia and through Polish Jewish women during WWII.

Isabel Canfield (Notre Dame) (via Zoom) “How Rape Can be Genocidal” TBD

Tim Challans (Booz Allen Hamilton) “Fascist Masculinity in Warfare”

What is the relationship between war, masculinity, and martial virtue? Fascism embodies an aesthetic that informs its nature and guides its judgment. This aesthetic motivates fascist practices from expressions of destructive masculinity in private life to murderous vice on the public battlefield. If there are any fascists today, who and where are they?

David K. Chan (University of Alabama at Birmingham) “Is there a Feminist Virtue Ethics of War?”

Is there a version of virtue ethics that adequately takes into account criticisms of war as an aggressive, masculine endeavor; and of just war thinking for disregarding the concerns of women, children, and other vulnerable groups? I examine hawkish and pacifist forms of virtue thinking before turning to my view that it is a tragic choice for virtuous leaders to go to war. And I ask whether this view takes sufficient account of the difference between how male and female leaders would make tragic choices.

Parish Conkling (Houston Community College) “Testimonial Exclusion in Accounts of Political Violence”

This project seeks to address the question of why women’s active participation in political violence remains overlooked. Despite a growing body of literature in diverse fields that shows that women can, do, and historically have, chosen to engage in violent acts, this literature is frequently relegated to the fringes of their respective disciplines and regarded as “feminist accounts”. I argue that what is needed is an epistemic re-framing of political violence that moves away from gendered descriptions and works to create a more inclusive understanding that looks at the motivations of individuals living in a gendered world.

Olena Komar (Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv) “Placing Women’s Self-Identity in the War: Victim or Warrior, Savior or Survivor”

The roles that are continually placed on women in times of war strictly limit their ability to express their own self-identity. However, the peaceful paradigm is a choice in a false dichotomy, into which the woman is also forced. “Coercion to peace” or pseudo-pacifism is imposed on women as a stereotypical gender role as if war is a “man’s business” and women’s role is to keep children and seek peace. Can a woman become more resilient to limitations and stronger in determining her identity via the practice of war? I will talk about these topics based on my personal wartime experience and the experiences of other women in Ukraine.

Rebecca Leiby (University of Baltimore) “Making Space for Mothers of Children ‘Born of War’ in Transitional Justice Theorizing”

Transitional justice has historically been conceived of as an aspirational process, in which a clear and bright line is drawn between the horrors of the past and the promise of the future. Attendant projects of accountability and reconciliation carry with them core assumptions about who counts as victim or perpetrator, and these assumptions are rarely straightforwardly unproblematic. One domain in which these assumptions prove especially challenging is the case of mothers whose children were conceived by wartime sexual assault. In this paper, I explore the puzzle this presents for the transitional justice project, the forward directionality of which runs the risk of leaving experiences of the deeply personal (and deeply complicated) behind.

Bonnie Mann (University of Oregon) “Gender as Justification for War”

Just War Theory tells us very little about how war is actually justified in the lives of citizens, soldiers and policy makers. I argue that operations of justification at a practical level work beneath reason and principle, at an embodied aesthetic level and in powerful dimensions of the social imaginary that not only resist reflection and cognitive engagement, but often shape them, or shut them down entirely. Gender and race play outsized parts in/as operations of justification that tap into deeply held visceral commitments that motivate patriotism, nationalism and war.

Danny Marrero (University of Texas Rio Grande Valley) “Femicidio: A Form of Biopolitical Power”

Judith Butler, in *The Force of Non-Violence*, claims that *femicidio* is a form of “inequality between men and women.” In this presentation, I will explore this idea showing that the structure distinguishing men’s lives as more valuable than women’s is a larger operation of biopolitical power. From this perspective, the biopolitical power leading to *femicidio* becomes ostensible when we pay attention to the ways in which women, and the feminized, are left to die.