

## **Video address to the conference**

### **'Gender and Peace' held at Sabanci University, Istanbul May 5-7 2017**

**by  
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in London**

Hello from London! First, let me congratulate you, women of "SU Gender", as you've become. Women of the "Gender Forum", Centre of Excellence in Sabanci University. Congratulations on organizing this conference on the important theme of 'Gender and Peace', despite the troubling and difficult times in Turkey, and worldwide.

When I first learned of the plan to name this conference as being "in honour of Cynthia Cockburn", my first reaction was to throw up my hands and say, "No! this can't be! This is totally undeserved!" I mean - just look at the names on the participation list, all of you gathered here this weekend. Simply to be associated with you all, as a conference attender, that would be an honour in itself. But then I tried to imagine what might have been in the minds of Ayse Gul, and Begum, and Betul, and others among you who had chosen to flag up my work in this way. And then I understood that, of course, the honouring this weekend, in reality, is of the many women whose gendered activism for peace I've had the honour of writing about, of documenting, over the last two or three decades.

First, we're honouring today a hundred or more women I could name in three countries, Northern Ireland, Bosnia and Israel Palestine, who feature in a book titled *The Space Between Us*, where you see them inventing and practising a methodology, a 'feminist transversal politics', by which to reach each other across the dangerous terrain of civil war. Next, in the island of Cyprus we're honouring a group of brave and persistent women coming together from Greek and Turkish sides of the militarized Partition Line, working for a unified island. Then there are the several hundred other women, and some men, I've met in Colombia, India, Uganda, Sierra Leone and half a dozen other countries - all of them activists in a worldwide movement opposing violence and war.

Among them are Turkish activists, because I've several times visited Istanbul, Ankara and Diyarbakir in these years of travel. I'm thinking particularly of women the former Amargi, here in Istanbul. Of Pinar Selek, and Yasemin Oz, and Nil Mutluer among others. Two of them are now in exile for their pains - I hope they know we're thinking of them!

So, I want to begin my few words today by saying: these are the many women, and some men as well, to whom, in featuring my reporting of them, this conference is rightly dedicated. And on their behalf, I want to thank you, S.U. Gender, very warmly for that honouring.

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In the few minutes I'll be speaking, I want to address the connection between the gender relation and violence / war as I've learned it from these peace activists. It's they who've led me to propose:

that gender is causal in militarization and war.

Not just that gender is associated with violence. It is, of course. We see it all along the continuum of *time* (in time of peace, in time of war), and the continuum of *scale* (from the blow of a fist, to Donald Trump's mega-bomb on an Afghan bunker). Gender helps us to see contiguity, and connection, between instances of violence. But we can go further:

We can, I believe, say the gender order as we live it has been one of the causes of the prevalence of violence in society throughout history.

The reason I think such a theory has been slow to evolve is due to the post-structuralist, post-modernist turn in the 1990s which seemed for a while to make it impossible to use the concept of 'patriarchy'. It became an outdated structuralist notion. However, I was hearing feminist anti-violence and anti-war activists boldly continuing to use the word.

I remember when I was in Okinawa - it would have been around twenty-ten. Naoko Ikeda and I were visiting the women of OWAAM: Okinawa Women Act Against Military Violence. The people of Okinawa are deeply burdened by militarization. Three-quarters of the massive US military presence in Japan is based in these small islands. The place is groaning under the weight of military hardware. And then there's the demand of the American soldiers for 'rest and recreation', in quotes, which means access to women's bodies. OWAAM was set up twenty years ago in response to an episode of rape by US Marines. And they became a well-respected part of the mainstream peace movement of Okinawa, opposing the Japan-US Security Treaty - the 'ampo' as it's called. The women will join an anti-ampo protest against a massive threat of violence such as a US nuclear submarine docking in a Japanese port, and at the other extreme they'll condemn as a weapon the fist, or the erect penis, if you like, of the individual perpetrator of violence against women. 'Security' is a word with a very big meaning for them.

Suzuyo Takazato is one of OWAAM's founders and key activists. Talking to us she used the word 'continuum' to stress the link between these different scales and kinds of violence on the islands. Violence against women, she said, is a significant part of global violence. And she went on to cite 'system', and 'patriarchy'. "The military is a violence-generating system," she said. "Patriarchy is a violence-generating social order. "

So, like a lot of other activist women I've met, like Aida Santos in the Philippines, like Marina Gallego Zapatas in Colombia, Suzuyo was not afraid to use the difficult word 'patriarchy', when many academic feminist theorists were avoiding it. It's they who gave me the courage to persist in using it in my search for causality.

I think of it this way...As feminists in this post-modernist era we stress the notion of 'intersectionality' to describe relationships at the individual level. In an 'intersectional' approach we see any one individual as positioned in and shaped by several intersecting power relations - for a start: those of economic class, ethnicity, and gender. A white, owning-class and male individual has a different life experience from a black, working class woman.

But where do we look to see the source of such power relations? We surely have to look upwards and outwards, to those society-wide 'structures'. OK, let's call them 'meta-processes' - that sounds less rigid, and recognizes that they are capable of changing and developing gradually over time. The economic system, deriving power from wealth, the racializing power of ethno-nationalism in tribes and nations, these two at least are surely undeniable. But right there, intersected with them in every human institution - in every corporation, church, family - is a third power system, the sex-gender order - which, with minor modifications, appears to have been, for millennia, one in which men exercise power over women. Patriarchy for short. Together these systemic power processes produce inequalities among us as individuals in the here and now.

And we can go further. All three of these power systems are intrinsically violent. Because it takes force to constitute the self as an inferiorized, exploited other - the landless labourer, the despised minority, woman as man's property. People don't submit willingly. So together these power processes cause interpersonal violence, strife, militarization and war. Gender isn't a sole cause of war, of course. It's not often an immediate cause. But it's an underlying cause, a predisposing factor, making the use of force always a likely choice.

I've chosen to see this theory, of "gender as causal in militarization and war", as a standpoint, in the Marxist sense - an understanding of the world generated by a particular collective social actor in struggle. For Lukacs and others, the "proletarian standpoint" was the theory collectively derived by the working class from its experience of struggle in labour. Nancy Hartsock has persuaded us of the idea of a feminist standpoint in women's labour. I'm suggesting, furthermore, that women may be understood as collectively deriving a feminist standpoint from our gender-specific experience of, and struggle against, violence in all its forms.

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Now - our conference organizers asked me to say in this talk what I think is most needed at this moment - what our activism and theorizing right

now might need to focus on. Well, I like to listen to Raewyn Connell, in Australia. She writes, (quote) 'Given the concentration of weapons and the practices of violence among men...gender relations appear to be strategic. Masculinities are the forms in which many dynamics of violence take shape ...Evidently (she says) a strategy for demilitarization and peace must include a strategy of change in masculinities.'

1: So, yes, I agree - that's the first thing. We have to make the shaping and reshaping of masculinities a policy issue. And for that you need a much more widespread grasp of the proposition of 20th century feminism that gender relations - masculinities and feminities - are NOT determined by genes, they aren't destiny. They are socially shaped - in the family, in education, in culture and law. We can act to change them. They are subject to policy.

For that to happen, the man behind the weapon, the masculine predominance in violence, sexual and otherwise, needs to be much more visible. I know that sounds ridiculous - male violence is all around us. Look at the UK national crime statistics: 95% of all violent crimes are committed by men. In the case of sexualized violence, fully 99% of crimes are committed by men. What could be more clear? Yet ... somehow, those gender-skewed statistics of violence don't get nearly the attention from policy-makers you might hope for, or expect.

One of the feminists who taught us about social gender was Ann Oakley - in her book *Sex, Gender and Society*, way back in about 1970. She's a neighbour of mine in north London today, and recently we've compared notes on our newspaper reading. We've both noticed how often a news report - let's say from a certain city of an epidemic of sexual abuse of "women and children". Throughout the article, reference will be made to the "abusers", "perpetrators", and so on ...but in gender-neutral terms like that, their sex not actually specified. No mention of the words man, men or masculine. It's implicit of course - the man in the perpetrator. But he's too often taken for granted, not clearly stated. This kind of coy invisibilizing of the sex of the offender has a serious effect: - the policy that's prompted by such an epidemic of abuse deals only with the victims. The authors will call for (quote) "better protection of women and children". You never read, or hear (quote) "What is it with men? We must reduce the violence of men and boys!"

2: Our second need, I feel, is to do more work on theorizing the growing number of men and women who contradict the stereotypes. We're seeing a few more men doing caring work, and many more women leaders. Look at Merkel, May, Le Pen. Even our newly appointed Commissioner of the London Metropolitan Police, the biggest police chief in the country, is a woman. Cressida Dick is her name. This would have been unthinkable till recently. Some people are arguing that these developments undermine feminist theory. But we know we can expect Cressida's experience in the job to be different from what her male predecessor experienced. Just as research has shown that women soldiers have different experiences from male soldiers; male rape victims from women rape victims etc.. Because they don't

escape dominant gender power relations - they continue to be framed within them.

3. The third need I think I'd pick out is for more men to become gender revolutionaries. Women have learned to oppose violence not just as people but as women, in our gender identity. We need men to do the same - to engage as men - resisting the complicity, and exploitation, of masculinity for war. Turkey's leading the way in this. Ayse Gul Altinay and others here have taught us all how Turkish boys are traditionally reared in soldier-mode. And we've seen some Turkish men turn this gender-shaping on its head... conscientious objectors refusing military service, re-writing masculinity as they challenge the state. In the UK we have a few, very few and very small, groups of men supporting each other in refusing violence. One group that joins us on the streets is called White Ribbon. We need many more White Ribbons.

LG-BTI activists are going to contribute hugely to achieving all three of the developments I've sketched above. They're growing in number, and are having an ever greater impact as a social movement. There can be no better starting place, in un-choosing violence, than shaking and breaking the tyrannical gender binary.

So - enough from me. Thank you for giving me this chance to contribute to what I know is going to be a fantastic and inspiring exchange of ideas this weekend. And a recommitment of energies, I'm sure. I'm terribly sad not to be able to be there with you. But I'm hoping to get texts and recordings of everything you say. Have a wonderful two days!