

Militarisation of Contemporary Societies and Feminism in the North

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Up to the present day, and without notable exceptions, feminist writings in Northern industrialised nations have not addressed the processes of militarisation and the structures which generate them, either as a mode of development which affects the situation of women, or as patriarchal structures elaborated solely by men. Feminist writings do not present the militarisation of contemporary societies as an obstacle to the realisation of the ideals sought throughout the International Women's Decade: equality, development and peace. Many Western feminists focused their writing more on the theme of equality than on that of development, and women peace activists only rarely proclaimed themselves feminist.

Feminists of the Western world have deciphered and identified the oppression of women by the patriarchal state, but generally they have done so in a selective and limited manner. They have identified the national state as: a sexist legislator responsible for the legitimisation of violence towards women in the field of civil, penal, social and fiscal rights; a sexist employer who carries out gender-based discrimination in the workplace; a sexist tax-collector who penalises prostitutes while sparing pimps, clients and brothel-keepers. Yet they remain silent when their national state proves to be a sexist agent in the distribution of budgetary resources, offering enormous sums to the men in the defence sector while allotting small amounts to sectors in which the majority of workers are women (education, health etc.).

This situation has come to pass as if feminists had limited the analysis of patriarchy and of sexism to the relations between the sexes, either on

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an inter-individual scale or in very limited contexts (family, work, political life, etc.). They have forgotten the analysis of the gender relations present at the heart of the structures and procedures of militarisation which have, if not generated, at least legitimised, developed and amplified to an extreme degree the violence of men towards women. Disarmament between states is not supported by feminist groups; in the same way, they do not examine parliamentary debates which, when it comes to voting on national budgets, distribute state funds to many different social partners. This distribution can never be neutral from the feminist point of view.

As a result of this approach, the national states of Western societies have been brought, under the pressure of women's movements, to formulate legislative changes and to take positive measures in favour of improving women's hitherto limited priority. There has been some emphasis on problems concerning the equality of sexes (juridical, economic, social and political equality) and concerning some forms of violence towards women (wife-beating, rape, sexual harassment, incest, excision, etc.). Yet these states systematically ignore the forms of violence towards women resulting from militarisation, since these national states are the principal architects of that militarisation, and pressure from feminists has not yet been able to reach them on this point.

It is therefore necessary to examine the various sociological factors that have contributed to this selective analysis of the patriarchal system within the Western feminist approach, factors that have also contributed to their tardiness, compared with the more comprehensive analyses of Third World counterparts. Among the more decisive factors of these findings, we can identify, first, the differential socialisation between the sexes; second, the lack of analysis by feminists of a sexist model of militarised development imposed on Southern countries; and third, such a model for Northern countries.¹

The dichotomy of gender-based education in the West

The Western feminist movement has always been deeply influenced by writings, theoretical and otherwise, of feminist authors and researchers, whether freelance or linked to a university, foundation or research institution. Western female students have always been particularly oriented towards literary studies, social sciences (history, linguistics, anthropology, psychology, education, communication, religion, etc.) and the arts. These women have been much less prepared, however, to decipher the sexism present in the world's contemporary political and military organisations, because they still represent such a small percentage in those fields of study (economics, political science, etc.) which would allow them to approach such subjects with a critical eye. As is true in the case of