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The Entry of Women into War

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More than 20 years ago in divided Berlin there were regular 'Open Days' in Tempelhofer Feld¹ in memory of the 'raisin bombers'² (*Rosinenbomber*). These bombers flew food (usually sweets in order to generate good will) into blockaded Berlin from 24 June 1948- 12 May 1949. Here Berlin parents and their children gathered to see US war planes up close and even board them, with the possibility of letting the children, especially sons, see and touch the buttons and gadgets used to release bombs. Such events were also popular during the Vietnam War. However, many thousands also disrupted this family celebration. As mothers with small children, we attended the fields to demonstrate against the Vietnam War. Our small group comprised of 13 women and 15 children who flew posters with such slogans as, *American bombers kill children in Vietnam*. Such a message seems appropriate and straightforward enough. As we walked down to the field the voices of our opposition, especially of other women, became loud with rage, pointing and shouting at us "over there!", but also "their children should be taken away!" and then "into the gas oven with them!". Fear rose within us and especially for our children. It was clear that we hadn't given enough thought to the fact that this was Berliners' idea of Sunday fun, namely because we couldn't imagine that fun and war went hand in hand. Our situation became increasingly threatening as a jeep driven by US

soldiers approached us. The soldiers jumped out and instead of arresting us formed a chain around us so that the opposing Berlin parents could not harm us. They also safely confiscated the posters which had put us under threat. It was under US military protection that we were able to leave the field. Without a word and in a strange twist of irony, we allowed those we mobilized against defend us, but this time it was against a different and unanticipated enemy. For us, the lesson is clear: the soldiers' job is to protect women and children. Regardless of whom wars are raged against, it is always already against women and children. Those women and children who object to war are usually understood as not part of the 'people', so it is these 'excluded people' who especially need the protection of soldiers. Such an experience beckons the question, in such instances of contentious opposition, what are the duties of the civilian population?

It is important to note that what follows is a response to the Gulf War, 1991. Moreover, is not intended to imply that bare economic interests did not play the decisive role during this War. This is despite the fact that the Gulf War would not have been possible without the consent of the people themselves; at least by those executing divisions of labour in what is the most insane business, where those who are governed are excluded from decision-making except for those who are in the capacity of soldiers. And yet a humane society depends on individuals acting in accordance with a humanity in which people behave humanely towards one another. But what does it specifically mean to be 'human' in the context of War?

During the Gulf War a freezing dog stood in the snow outside a grocery store, waiting for its owner to return. A group of elegant women kept warm by the coats fashioned out of the countless skins of killed animals, formed around the dog. One of women yelled, "The dog should be taken away from people like that", while another agreed and added, "they should go to prison for cruelty to animals". On it went in collective agreement as the level of one's own righteousness rose to great heights.

Access for Men Only?

Women continue to struggle for our mere entry into history; at this juncture we are already amid an ongoing war. If we had known that wars constitute the patriarch of history, then its relation to the matriarch is still largely unknown. Wars are waged by men against other men, charged with the vernacular of masculine language. However, we find the Iraq War takes up a different language: it is the "mother of all battles".

As feminists we hold firm ideas that war is masculine; it is spoken, lived, acted, and owes itself to the logic of masculine business. Moreover, it is understood that

most war and war-time symbols belong to the realm of the masculine: weapons, technology, plans of battle, the very combat itself. While appearing self-evident, it is nevertheless shocking that while even most chemical and technological developments have signalled the end of the 20th century, the Gulf War is thought of as primarily an 'oil war'. By contrast (and no less a dumbing down) the medieval language employed regarding the supposed feelings of people which can oscillate between revenge and retribution, honour and male disappointment, is, according to Piaget, nuanced and specific only to boys under the age of six. He goes on to theorise that children and eventually everyone (according to his overly optimistic diagnosis) develops a sense of justice determined by feelings of reparation in the face of unjustness. Even so, it seems that feminist insights into the direct correlations between masculinity and militarism do not seem to be entirely correct in both past and present times. Rather such insights have enabled an assumption that we can speak of 'warlike' histories as masculine, likely because of the fantasy that these same wars can no longer be waged in the present. Or to put it another way, how do women who exist as a part of 'warring societies' act *as women* if we assume that war is an exclusively male construction and thus, reality? Do we think that in the context of war women once again are nothing but victims of male power? Thus is our inability to act manifold? Are women subject to speechlessness during war time? It seems that what we have is a mediatised language about war, and the example of the Gulf War offers abundant satisfaction to our assumptions that war itself is of purely male constructions and deeds. From the start, the media attempts to stylise war as an inherent struggle between two male caricatures; one of whom is committed to abstract values of freedom and justice, and the other who is obsessed with intoxication and madness. Various insights into economic interests serve to illuminate masculine images of war as much as supposed triumph over the technical efficiency of weapons. In all the speechlessness, helplessness and horror of war, women are also faced with the problem that we have once again driven ourselves out of the contexts and narratives of war via our own assumption that war is unquestioningly and inherently masculine. Since women initially seem to have nothing to do with inciting and initiating war, we are thus left with no counteraction. Feminist analysis, although not its intention, has brought about a further marginalization of women through the trivialization of women's role in war and war time. The result is there is arguably little to no entry into military history for women. In such desperation to claim something of women's interpellation in war, the attempts to intellectually reassure oneself of, for example, the masculinity of rockets because of their phallic appearance, seems strangely abstract and innocuous in view of the actual and symbolic destruction caused by war.

However, let us first approach the problem of war as a symbolic field. The Gulf War is also a media war. Here, for the media an internal mobilization takes place, particularly since we can say that the Gulf War was a computer-controlled war (CAW³) and therefore requires the consent of governments and people. A glance back at the media of the time not only shows the high entertainment value this war had, but also, how the conviction was quickly gained that the war largely and essentially occurred without women (and without regards to the question of the 'soldier' which I go on to pose below). Critically speaking, the Gulf War was framed, on one hand as 'holy' and as on the other hand, as 'cultureless' – despite it also being labelled 'insane'. This demonization of the Iraqi people ensured that the US remained the 'saviour of the world'. In a contradiction in which there can be no agreement between such positions, we are inevitably drawn in by feeling and reason to the side of salvation, even at the price of the destruction of us all inhabiting this very same world. That vested interests were initially kept silent and side-lined; the history of this oil war was suppressed. That oil was only discussed in the context of ecological destruction and not its squandering for the high standard of living in western capitalist countries, is appropriately situated at the beginning of most media reporting. But it is only later that tabloids take these issues up with any consistency. The liberal press names *names*, interests, offenses, guilt and yet at the same time erects edifices of hope of a 'New World Order' out of sheer desperate necessity. Among these are voices are those who consider humanity's self-destruction to be inevitable and 'natural' – that is, humans are naturally aggressive, violent, power-hungry, ruthless, and so on. Even within this attribution, we are left with little opportunity to characterize such alleged human characteristics as typically 'masculine'. The dubiousness of such subordination is all too clear. Neither within media campaigns nor in subsequent critical media reflections do we find figures of women or even insightful connections between gender relations and the relations of production.

However, there are two dimensions which seem to be less silent as far as considerations of gender relations are concerned: the question of technology in war, and the discursive arrangement of reason and unreason. Here the assumption that gender relations are at least implicitly discussed or that these are used for the question of internal mobilization stems from feminist traditions of knowledge. The history of Enlightenment and the construction of the concept of reason based on the dualistic opposition of nature (as inherently female) builds on male privilege as foundational to thinking more generally has been demystified by feminists. Here we can assert that the basis of the 'male-reasonable' worldview, that is, the world of

order, is that it should be enforced against the 'female-natural' worldview precisely in order to protect the female (and her 'natural' position) because it is assumed that under this dualism, she is not capable of orderly, reasonable survival, as one of the recognized foundations for male supremacy. The subjugation of nature for one's own 'better' survival and the subjugation of 'women as nature' (natural) appear to stem from a similar dualistic relationship. Employing nature as a quarry which wastes women's lives by appropriating female labour for men's own well-being is reasoned away as an unfortunate basic law which orders the social. In such a discursive context, the deployment of categories such as 'sanity' and 'rationality' for US warfare and the attribution of 'unreasonableness' to Iraqi war leaders is a peculiar shift. When reading in the media about Saddam Hussein's madness and insanity, it seems unremarkable (and oblivious) that he is being spoken of as a woman who is to be subordinated to the male-reasonable western world under the leadership of the USA, namely Bush. And yet such reporting also mobilizes feelings of protection, or perhaps rather feelings of protective custody, towards a population who were willing to follow such a leader. Such an interpretation foils dissent and ensures prevailing gender relations are unchallenged, credible, even reasonable, and therefore, even if only vaguely recognised, compelling.

The Soldier

Let's us now turn our attention into gaining insights into how women are directly interpellated into war and warfare. The emergence of the female soldier disorders the symbolic functioning of gender relations. Before we look at media reporting on women's deployment on the frontline, let's recall what constitutes a 'good soldier'. From my own recollections as a conscientious objector there existed heated debates between those who more generally opposed war and those who were forced to fight (sometimes these positions embodied the same person). If we follow, for example, the German tabloid newspaper *Bildzeitung*, the collective agreement is understood as, first and foremost an oath to the Federal Republic to "serve faithfully and to bravely defend the rights and freedom of the German people."⁴ The obvious choice of words pulls us unexpectedly into past earlier centuries. Our mind's eye captures the fantasy of the brave fighter swinging his sword undaunted and serving, remaining loyal to the death, since nothing less than the rights and freedom of an entire population were at stake. The same words lose their dignity when used for women at war. How can women bravely defend their innocence, their faithful servitude to their husbands and children, as well as the protection of community rights and freedoms in the context of war? The only female figure who

stands apart as capable of doing this is Joan of Arc, Maid of Orléans, the unnatural one, who consequently ends up on the scaffold. But the text of *Bildzeitung* goes beyond just citing an oath into the present day. We can learn something which is nevertheless unconsciously expected: a real German soldier does not put his conscience on the back burner but rather has 'learned how to use a weapon' in order to be able to kill if necessary. This is the 'duty of bravery': *The taxpayer affords soldiers so that they can fight in an emergency... and risk (their) lives.* We can cynically label such affordances as 'having a backbone'. It is the soldier who needs a backbone, not taxpayers. This strange division of labour occurs in which war is inscribed again ostensibly as one among men, at least in the Federal Republic. Put simply, some men pay for others to defend rights and liberties as a job to which they themselves are ideologically committed. In this respect we are not so far removed from the mercenaries of earlier times. The further back in history we go (in the symbolic world), the more difficult it becomes to think of women actively as part of such an order. So, let's turn our attention to the reporting of the soldier during the Gulf War and closely look at an article from February 2nd, 1991, from the *Hamburger Morgenpost*: "40,000 Men are Women". The text is accompanied by a large photo of a soldier with a baby button on her helmet. Any discursively analytical reading is made more complex by the constant contending with one's own feelings, which the text also skilfully plays around with. The captain, who is bidding farewell to 'his' eleven-month-old daughter, rightly sheds tears because 'he' is a woman, just as the men in the title header are also women. Such a headline speaks volumes about gender reversals which give rise to spontaneous affects and questions: How can a wife and mother say goodbye to her small baby without inadvertently starving it? Is the husband standing on the threshold, ready and waiting to necessarily raise the child as a widower? Has the mother agreed giving the baby to another home? The journalist abruptly reveals our doubts and casts them into a greater terror, writing that "it's only a matter of time when, for the first time in US history, a female soldier will return home in a black plastic body bag." The collision of words – plastic/corpse/home – intentionally cause shock, but when it comes to the soldier's question, the matter becomes far more urgent: what would actually be the home to which she is returning, particularly that it will have been likely destroyed during her departure? Only where there is a woman in waiting can a corpse be taken 'home'. Unnerved by such anticipation and the need to prepare for this, the text continues: "there will be problems with public opinion when the first woman dies as a soldier in the war; nevertheless, 2,000 dead soldiers are expected." Although it seems that women aren't officially part of the fighting force, they do however load rockets, repair tanks or work as Signals, but in the thick of the battle gender becomes irrelevant to

numbers. Admission to military service, once celebrated as equality also proves just as equal in death. Moreover, servicewomen were increasingly becoming pregnant (apparently out of fear of war participation) and thereby declared unfit for service. Elsewhere, we learn “other problems” namely that “there have been numerous pregnancies in the mixed troop”.⁵ The text continues, “There are no penalties for women who become pregnant... they all know that we purposely do it.” Moreover “the dilemma for women and married couples in war is to leave the children.”⁶

The matter-of-fact tone of the media seeks without being explicit, an agreement with the following implicit messages that women are categorised as, 1. emotional (they are afraid); 2. physical (they become pregnant); 3. sex beings (women are difficult to distinguish from men in the thick of battle); 4. legal systems (they can't fly jets or pilot tanks which render them as abstractions of the law); and 5. Mothers (who need to abandon their babies or are thus unfit for war). That the women soldier could, like the male soldier, result in death forces public opinion into unpredictable disorder and is a dubious success of the women's movement.⁷ The feat this article achieves is twofold: it not only puts equal rights for women on the agenda from the very beginning but already dismisses it as inadmissible. Yet at the same time and in view of the Gulf War, the article enables a comprehensive reflection on the reality of the female soldier that the question of the war itself, where men kill and are killed, disappears as unimportant behind the horizon of thought. The lesson we learn is that when we meddle in “women's business”, we miss “man's business”, even if women have actively sought to meddle in man's business, like war.

However, the media also reveals in other ways the presence of women in war. Technical efficiency along with its ensuing silence about killings in Iraq should have given the impression of an entirely bloodless war. Within such a sanitised image, equality for women can be easily imagined. In an article about land operation warfare with bayonets and stabbed bodies is undermined. Instead, we see a photo of a female soldier with a concentrated expression staring at the computer.⁸ giving the impression that she has ‘the Patriot under control’. The accompanying text makes it clear that control cannot occur in a militarised land operation, since through the very choice of words such a combative war is played out ‘man to man’ with enemy contact’, is ‘dirty’ and laden with victims. Here the woman-as-soldier ‘serves’ quite differently under this new more passive gaze. Her presence is proof that warfare is humane and not warlike. Moreover, and accordingly, is imperative to note that women are only mentioned on the side of the Americans and the Allied forces.

Interestingly, it seems that women have the capacity to keep the media in a state of suspense; there are almost always photos of women who could equally be seen in a fashion section of a newspaper rather than in a headline about war. The

fashion accessory, arguably the machine gun, points to her. In the *Hamburger Morgenpost*, March 15th 1991, there is report of the release of prisoners of war following the end of the Gulf War. It is stated that a female US soldier's smile was so dazzling, her image should be on the front page of French lifestyle magazine, *Paris Match*. Suddenly a litany of photos emerges from around the world in which the imaginary of the female is literally 'in full gear'. Some are images of young women with dreamy looks or asleep with teddy bears in their arms. Such images depict peacefulness and contradicts the accompanying text of police corruption and controversy surrounding the world: "At least when she's sleeping, she wants to feel at home". War rhetoric leaning towards the USA repeatedly reads as "reason, leadership, strength, peace", assuming that peace is the logical result of the war, and the USA is the "only nation that was able to assemble the forces of peace".⁹ It is no accident that the USA is seen to represent the interests of all people like a father represents his children.

A closer look at media reviews of female soldiers during the Gulf war illustrates many contradictory subjective positions. Contrary to all previous assumptions, women are primarily mothers even during war and here, war itself is more likely to become a 'mothers' war' rather than one in which women are enabled to shed their biological and social forms. If women soldiers are not already mothers, they are mediated in three distinctive ways: 1. As self-confident and intentionally pregnant women; 2. as victim of rape,¹⁰ or 3. as 'adult' children (or infantilised adults). In all cases women are only biologically interpellated in the reproductive context, so it is not surprising that their functions and actions are not described in terms of their abilities, but rather as bodies with problems: "In the sandy desert and the murderous heat, the possibilities for body care and hygiene are very limited."¹¹ Women soldiers are depicted as if men didn't have bodies at all, or if dirt and filth and stench naturally belonged to male soldiers engaged in the act of war.¹² The entire reporting of all soldiers moves away from war itself and into the order of gender(ed) relations. This appears most intensely as in the question posed (by the magazine *Quick*, among others): *What did women lose in the war?* The double meaning of the word 'lose' should be downgraded: in war women lose fathers and husbands, sons, and brothers, but not themselves, since they do not possess themselves in wartime in quite the same way. So, in the end we come to the relatively simple formula that women are less permitted to kill because their role is to give birth to life. These two positions based on biology seem irreconcilable and such incompatibility calls for an explanation, which must be related to the inciting of war itself. Incidentally, it should be stated that the preoccupation with the position that women should not kill

obscures the monstrosity of why men are more permitted to do so when they do not give birth?

It is remarkably peculiar how the vernacular of war language intentionally mixes the double meanings of gender relations. For a while, rhetoric of Germany's 'impregnability' circulated the media: as if a country were a woman! Such an attitude can be thought of as cultural preparedness. If we remember the beloved fairy tales of our childhood, such fantasies of always being prepared are often merged in the everyday task of catching up with social events...

§§§

The Tale of the Virgin Queen

There is a story of a King who had three sons, the youngest of whom, considered more stupid than the others, was despised (or sacrificed to the clergy). The King was sick and nearing death, his only saviour being the 'water of life' as his only hope. But this final hope was closely guarded by the Virgin Queen, who is herself impregnable. One by one, as each of the King's sons moves out of the family castle, they are met by an old woman who spends her time sewing up the cracks appearing in the earth. Exalted from the senselessness of such an activity, the sons move on in their pointless lives, achieving nothing. But the youngest, more curious son, immediately asks the old woman what she is doing? He then wishes her every success and upon doing so is then initiated into the secrets of the Virgin Queen. The secret knowledge is, that in order to know nature one must know the nature of man: to be willing to stand in the natural world in order to harbour off treachery, one must only defend against nature in order to find an entrance into oneself and thus the kingdom of man. Upon knowing this, the son bites the Queen on the cheek to consume her water of life. So, the Queen bears the mark by which she can question him when she finally enters the city gates with a now newly strengthened King alongside her invincible army of soldiers. She will not take leadership of the city, but she herself will be taken by marrying the youngest, more curious son. The childish triumph is here that the youngest, smallest, neglected, stupidest outwits the Queen, saves the King and finally the whole city. What is readily overlooked in this fairy tale is the fact that the Queen had to be overcome like a fortress, that nature was duped by its own means, that in the rivalry among the King's male descendants, neither the people (loyal

soldiers to the King) nor the Queen were triumphant. Moreover, that this victory was made even possible was by the wise advice of an old woman trying to repair the damage done to nature.

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What exactly do soldiers do in war? In the *Hamburger Abendblatt* we read that women “are mechanics who repair tanks and are doctors who repair wounded soldiers' bodies...”. It appears women repair, repair, repair... Nevertheless, their direct presence in war is as false as the Maid of Orléans or the Virgin Queen. For women, in war there seems only two choices: death or marriage. It occurred to the authors of the *Quick* article that women soldiers exist in a perpetual “emergency situation” – one in which they could even “rob Iraqi children of their parents”, as if such a task were a dutiful ‘privilege’ for women. But the authors also ask a different question, one which has occupied the media for a while: should young mothers be allowed to go to war, namely those “women who have just married or young mothers who will never really get to know their children or those for whom motherhood is not a duty to be rid of?” The superficial empathy imbued with this question is itself already a confirmation of the existing gender order. However, we can also look to the wives of the soldiers. For example, *Bild*¹³ pathetically offers that President Bush flew to North Carolina in order to meet a woman who has been living between fear and hope for 10 days as her husband did not return from his first assignment. Here too, hasty empathy conceals the monstrosity that her fear is now more apparent when it was once not before he left for his duty to kill. However, Bush himself proffers his own higher motives for his visit. He would like to use hero worship to nip the revival of the Vietnam trauma and thus a possible civil resistance to the war, in the bud. Our media is full of stories about parents who only after their sons are reported missing become afraid and anxious.

Such statements and the practices in war suggest to us that women's bodies are employed here in multiple ways. It is not usually the same woman who is a mother because she was a victim of rape and is ironically in need of men's protection. However, it is certainly the same man who is permitted to kill other men and rape the wives of their enemy. The image of the ‘mutual enemy’ is constructed in such a way that the desecration of women is the inevitable revenge of the ‘civilized’ peoples against the ‘uncivilized’. A strange reversal of moral order might occur in the case where one's wife is brought into enemy territory as a soldier. The moral duty to protect one's wife at home provides the template to protect one's wife if she is a soldier at war. Such protection is a sobering lament to the ‘desire to kill’ and what is

at stake when wars are disrupted by women, especially soldier-wives, is the spoils of victory.

In this respect, it might seem a necessary feminist act to actively participate at the front line in the event of war. However, the real question lies as to what extent existing gender relations legitimize the waging of wars? Not, whether equality should actually be pushed into existing wars? Rather, we can think the latter as more of a heuristic means in order to discover more about how the logic of war works as well as understand how the usual order of things (processes, sets of relations and so on) are disrupted by internal mobilizations. The oft peculiar response to such inquiry is that women are also participatory in a variety of wars, especially concerning male violence (and thus resultant pleas to be objects of male protection); where they give birth and care for life; where they have to thrive in so-called divisions of labour in which they are overly responsible and where they are forced to view themselves as a female (body) in relation to other males. Here the female body essentially exists as the abstraction of life, so much so that in physical touch and violence – as in war and rape – become so intertwined they are indiscernible to the other. The weakness of women is the wariness of men. So, it would be the harmlessness of women which contributes to the monstrous logic of war. Such orientation resides, 'lives' even, in the logic of war that it is both meaningful and abhorrent.

It's not just the symbolic logic of killing or raping, but also the large numbers which accompany these words and actions. We have never been able to experience the triumphs of large numbers so clearly as in the Gulf War. For example, the *Hamburger Abendblatt*, among many others, reports on any given day: "2,400 missions were flown in 24 hours: Up to 22.2. there were already 88,000 missions." The bombs used in Kuwait weigh "7 tons" and are called "lawnmower bombs" because of their enormous explosive power.¹⁴ Such language illustrates how the outrageous becomes familiar. Just as the front yard at home serves as a comparison with the killing machine, other deeds are also domesticated in one leap, so to speak. People kill for 'freedom', 'justice' and 'human dignity'. No wonder women find it so difficult to imagine anything concrete and justifiable especially under such empty words.

Women in Iraq

While many supporters spoke of the Gulf War in concrete ways while abstracting the Iraqi people, almost everyone in the entire civilized world spoke against a single man, Saddam Hussein as a mad man and a caricature of Hitler. This was enough to cause a rupture on the left. Even with the all the reasonable knowledge at the disposal of war supporters, the memory of Hitler is enough to

ensure that the evil of Saddam needs to be eradicated. Such an annihilation, which the world's secret services could have initiated without too much difficulty, paradoxically demands the restructuring of entire national budgets and the rearmament of the US military. Despite all the weeks of 'lawn mower bombs', 'living room carpet bombs' such an event never takes place. But what we do know is that an efficient military is reliant upon number crunching; it is not life and death at stake here. The media continues to purport such intimate fantasies of men in war. For example, it is reported that General Schwarzkopf, leading commander during the Gulf War decided to postpone his family Christmas until after his arrival back in the US. The media bombards us with images of his wife and three children waiting with neatly wrapped gifts under the family Christmas tree: "then there will also be his favourite dish: duck with baked rice and then peppermint ice cream with chocolate sprinkles."¹⁵ Following the war we then see photos of his happy family reunion. The fathers have returned: "The jubilation with which America welcomes its heroes is boundless"¹⁶ In the same article we learn about the real 'time bomb': "a storm of screaming women and children on 500 defenceless men (returnees from the war) in desert clothes" as they are received happily back as husbands and fathers.

While we hear nothing from Iraqi men, we are able to listen to their wives. While there appears some general disapproval of women in the military as being a nonsense feminist cause, there seems to be little reflection, especially by the media of women's great disadvantage in some countries. It remains still controversial whether women have the unequivocal right to vote at all.¹⁷ The images of the veiled women from Islam make it necessary to document their voices here:

War for Kuwait: War to destroy Iraq.

War for a New World Order: War for US imperialism and Israeli supremacy.

War in the Name of International Law: War for Oil.

We Arab women

We are convinced that it is never too late

that every conflict must be solvable by peaceful means

that if the rulers lack wisdom, the populations need not lack it

that such wars also because women are excluded from decision-making areas(...)

We Arab women

we condemn the carpet bombing of terrorized civilian populations

the destruction of the cradle of our civilization

the annihilation of Iraq's scientific, cultural, and economic potential

the despicable bombing that is destroying schools, hospitals and holy places

*Condemn the marginalization of the Palestinian cause by dual-weight politics
Condemn the return to barbarism, even if electronic and behind closed doors.*

We Arab women

*let's deny those who call themselves 'great powers' the right to decide on wars
let's demand the right of the peoples of the countries to veto the war!*

*Let us demand an immediate halt to the war, lest hopelessness and hatred
settle in our region once and for all.*

*Let us demand the immediate start of an international conference for peace
and a just and equitable settlement of all conflicts in the Middle East, first and
foremost that legitimate right of the Palestinian people to an independent
state.*

*We demand an immediate halt to the war for a just, dignified, and lasting
peace.¹⁸*

The collection of folk tales set in the Middle Ages, *One Thousand and One Nights* (often known as *Arabian Nights*) tells the story of Scheherazade (virgin daughter of high-ranking political advisor) who offers herself to the King as his next bride so he would stop marrying and then killing virgins before they could betray him. In order to postpone her inevitable execution, Scheherazade tells the King story after story – tragedies, philosophy, comedies, poetry, fables, erotica and so on – which keep him captivated enough to want to know the end. Scheherazade succeeds in buying day after day for one thousand and one nights. Scheherazade's intervention teaches us something: to preserve life, might it be that women have a political say in the question of war? Perhaps even should a women's instituted ballot be initiated on the very validity of war itself? In this way Scheherazade is a historically significant figure and not a fantasy. But in questioning war, might women also have to surrender or at least call into question their socially constructed 'harmlessness' as implicit to their own division of labour on all points of their lived experience? Moreover, are women not compelled to transform socially ascribed notions of 'weakness' into strength, interfere where and when they can, and no longer tolerate or even support the development of masculinity in conventional senses – especially regarding how expectations which hover over concepts like 'law' and 'freedom' can

be hollow and lacking in any real substance? Do women need to angrily admit that we are still sometimes thought of as within a prehistory of mankind?

At the time of the Gulf War, one hundred and fifty wars had been fought since 1945. According to UNICEF, sixty million children had died. And yet 40,000 children die every day as a result of malnutrition in the Third World.¹⁹ It is mind boggling that UNICEF's annual aid program costs as much as world defence expenditure for ten days. And yet, we are constantly bombarded with the message that women and children are essentially protected in war.

Translated by Cindy Zeiher, 2023

Notes

¹ Tempelhofer Feld historically was an area south of Berlin used for military practice and parades. It currently serves as a public space.

² 'Raison Bombers' is the colloquial name given by Berliners to the Western Allied (American and British) transport aircraft which brought supplies to Berlin during the 1948/49 blockades.

³ Combined Arms Warfare.

⁴ 04/02/1991, the 19th day of the Gulf War.

⁵ *Hamburger Abendblatt*, 19/02/1991.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ *The Herald Tribune*, however, assures us on 02/01/1991 that public opinion is probably more emotional intensely against Saddam rather than the actuality of war itself.

⁸ *Hamburger Abendblatt*, 23/01/1991.

⁹ *Hamburger Abendblatt*, 02/26/1991.

¹⁰ Rape being the "primal fear of women", especially during war, *Quick*, 21/02/1991.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² "During the menstrual period, women's energy is weakened!" is a warning-like catchphrase which is perpetuated by the media.

¹³ 01/02/1991

¹⁴ *Hamburger Abendblatt*, 22/02/1991.

¹⁵ *Hamburger Morgenpost*, 08/03/1991.

¹⁶ *Die Welt*, 01/03/1991 regarding a photo image of two laughing women.

¹⁷ It is important to note that while voting is a legal right in most countries, there still exists obstacles for some women to fully participate. For example, the Vatican City doesn't allow women to vote, Saudi Arabia prevents women from exercising independent votes by insisting on male permission, Afghanistan requires that women ask permission to leave their home in order to vote. There are many other countries where women are discouraged from voting: Qatar, Kenya, Nigeria and Papua New Guinea, to name a few.

¹⁸ Taken from anti-war newspaper no. 1, 01/24/1991.

¹⁹ Figures according to *Hamburger Abendblatt* of 07/02/1991.