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Review by Manuela Scheuermann, University of Wuerzburg

It is a very common belief to perceive women as more peaceful than men. Female stereotypes are connected to care, communication, tolerance and compassion. The first wave of feminists promoted this ideal of not only peace loving but peace bringing women.¹ These very traditional attributes of the female role model became even more politically relevant during the current COVID-19 crisis. Female heads of state were commended for their female crisis management, for showing compassion and extraordinary sympathy with their people while managing the pandemic. The media described German Chancellor Angela Merkel and other female leaders as caring and motherly, wondering whether women are the better leaders and crisis managers.² The connection of women to everything peaceful and pacifying has long prevailed.

In IR, the connection between women and peace is best known as the women and peace hypothesis, which is closely related to the democratic peace hypothesis.³ Sarai B. Aharoni summarized the various arguments of the hypothesis as follows: because women are more peace oriented, more communicative, and more open for dialogue, they are less likely to support war related actions.⁴ Moreover, women want the so-called positive peace to be realized. Positive peace includes not only the absence of armed violence but the end of structural violence and human insecurity. Influential global peace and security institutions, first and foremost the United Nations but also NATO, adapted the women and peace hypothesis to initiate gender-related peace and security policies. In the early 2000s, they created the slogan "women are the key to peace" to underline their desire for more female soldiers and peace negotiators. They started the

¹ Malcom Saunders, "Are women more peaceful than men?: The experience of the Australian section of the women's international league for peace and freedom, 1915-1939," *Interdisciplinary Peace Research* 3 (1991): 45-61.

² Christian Stoer, "Corona-Krise weltweit: Besonders die Frauen beweisen Fuehrungsstaerke," *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 16 April 2020, <https://www.fr.de/politik/corona-virus-krise-merkel-ardern-andere-chefinnen-frauen-beweisen-spitze-zr-13652720.html>.

³ Ifat Maoz, *Women and Peace Hypothesis* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing 2011).

⁴ Sarai B. Aharoni, "Who needs the Women and Peace Hypothesis? Rethinking modes of inquiry on gender and conflict in Israel/Palestine," *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 19:3 (2017): 311-326.

global agenda for “Women, Peace and Security” for which civil society organizations like the Women’s League for Freedom und Peace had been advocating for decades. ⁵

But even if the traditional stereotype of the peaceful and pacifying woman is dominant in the political discourse, there is also evidence that women may – under some given circumstances – not be as peace-loving as predicted. Going even further, women might have a rightful place among warmongers.

The phenomenon of war-fighting women, especially women who begin a conflict, goes back to ancient times. Pharaoh Hatshepsut (1480 BCE), who represents the archetype of a strong woman ruling a male-dominated society, led a campaign under Thutmosis III. Boudica (60 CE) was not only the British queen of the Iceni but also an army commander who led the ultimately unsuccessful Boudicca Revolt in the early years of the Roman occupation of Britain. In the medieval and even in the modern era we find more examples of warfighting female heads of state. Oeindrila Dube and S.P. Harish studied 28 queens, reigning from 1480 to 1913, to conclude “that politics led by queens engaged in war more than politics led by kings.”⁶ The most interesting result of their study is their argument that marital status, and not the desire to signal strength, that motivated these queens to unleash a war. They write: “married queens were more inclined to enlist their spouses in helping them rule, which enabled them ultimately to pursue more aggressive war policies.”⁷

This is where Madison Schramm and Alexandra Stark’s article comes in, asking whether female leaders of the present are peacemakers or ‘iron ladies’ who start wars like British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher did with the Falklands? Are the iron ladies of today the rule rather than the exception (516)? The authors argue that the peacefulness of female heads of state is not a given. Based on an impressive array of literature on domestic political institutions, feminist theory, and poststructuralism they develop two groundbreaking hypotheses. In contrast to the majority of feminist IR researchers, Schramm and Stark search for causal mechanisms behind gender effects. Thus, they embark on a path of feminist research that has been taken far too infrequently, and which Theodora-Ismene Gizelis identified as the major methodological gap of feminist research.⁸ Additionally, they zoom in the neglected and understudied individual level of international relations and use arguments of social identity theory. With their rich trans-disciplinary theoretical approach and their ambition to find causal mechanisms they enter almost uncharted territory and build bridges between more conventional IR, trans-disciplinary approaches, and feminist theory.

Their core argument from which they derive the hypotheses is that the gendered effects which trigger decisions to go to war rely on the social and institutional context in which the heads of state govern. In the tradition of poststructuralism they understand gender as performative and contextually constructed.

According to the authors, the social context is first and foremost the in-group of the national foreign policy circle. Schramm and Stark argue that “gender works as a key marker of identity to maintain in-group-out-group boundaries within elite policymaking circles” (517). These in-groups are mostly all-boys-clubs, especially in the policy field of peace and security. The in-groups are characterized by a highly masculine culture and stereotypical behavior like effectiveness,

⁵ Sarah E. Davies and Jaqui True, *Oxford Handbook on Women, Peace and Security* (New York: Oxford University Press 2019).

⁶ Oeindrila Dube and S.P. Harish, “Queens,” *Journal of Political Economy* 128:7 (July 2020): 2579.

⁷ Dube and Harish, “Queens,” *Journal of Political Economy* 128:7 (July 2020): 2579.

⁸ Theodora-Ismene Gizelis, “Systematic Study of Conflict, Gender and Peace,” *Peace Economics, Peace Science and Public Policy* 24:4 (2018).

rationality, strength, rule-based decisions, and dominance. Micro-level studies of glass ceiling situations prove that women have to gain status within such peer in-groups in order to be able break the ceiling.⁹ That is why women in leading positions often behave in a strongly masculine manner.

Additionally, Schramm and Stark include the institutional context of the political systems in order to develop their hypotheses. It is a great added value of the study that the authors focus on democracies. Therefore, they are able not only to challenge the women and peace hypothesis but the most popular and influential hypothesis of IR as well – the hypothesis that democracies are less likely to go to war than non-democracies. They argue that female heads of government are more likely to act like iron ladies if there are domestic political constraints on their decisions. Political constraints are the order of the day, especially in parliamentary democracies, where the leaders have to demonstrate assertiveness and the support of the influential in-groups is vital to succeed. Conor Seyle, the CEO of One Earth Future (OEF) Research argues that “if women ruled a country but the parliament was dominated by men ...they were more likely to use military force - because they probably have to fight the stereotypes that they're weak.”¹⁰

Additionally, the authors develop the argument that the more politically empowered women are in the country the less likely the head of state decides to start an armed conflict. A female head of a gender-balanced state is not confronted with all-boys-clubs and is therefore not forced to play a masculine role in foreign policy. This popular feminist argument was further elaborated on by Mary Caprioli and Carol Cohn, who underline the fact that states are less likely to enter into conflict when more gender equality exists.¹¹

Taking these presumptions into account, Schramm and Stark try to identify causal mechanisms between the leader's gender (behavior), domestic political institutions and societal norms. They hypothesize “that women leaders are more likely to engage in such conflicts when they are the leaders of governing systems with higher levels of constraint on the executive, meaning the executive is more directly accountable to a body of representatives ... Women leaders are also less likely to initiate such conflicts in societies with higher levels of women's empowerment, where gender is, therefore, less likely to be a salient marker of certain leadership characteristics” (517). They thus ask which gendered motivation lies behind the decision to initiate a conflict.

To provide evidence for the causalities (a very positivist way of research), they use statistical models and add two shadow case studies where they apply process tracing. The statistical results, which are derived by converting the Correlates of War Dataset, indicate that the assumed causalities are actually present. Schramm and Stark are also able to demonstrate that “increased women's representation in the national legislature dampens the likelihood of conflict initiation when a woman is at the helm” (539). To prove the value of the evidence, Schramm and Stark add two single case studies, one where the female head decided to begin a conflict (Turkey's Prime Minister Tansu Çiller, 1993-1996) and the case of the president of Chile, Michelle Bachelet (2006-2010 and 2014-2018), who promoted reconciliation between conflicting parties instead of acting like an iron lady. It is clear that these qualitative case studies are needed to provide evidence for the authors' theory. But their selection appears to be not as consistent as the rest of their argument. Bachelet, a caring mother, a former health doctor, United Nations diplomat, and fighter for human security, is such an extraordinary example of a stereotypically pacifist and – yes – female leadership that the results were not that surprising. And it comes as no surprise that Çiller, a former economics professor who was used to breaking glass ceilings and practicing male behavior, acted like a warmonger. It would be an added value of future studies to analyze more stable

⁹ David Purcell and Kelly Rhea MacArthur and Sarah Samblanet, “Gender and the Glass Ceiling at Work,” *Sociology Compass* 4:9 (2010).

¹⁰ Dana Heide, “Frauen – die besseren Staatschefs,” *Wirtschaftswoche*, 26 August 2016.

¹¹ Mary Caprioli, “Gendered Conflict,” *Journal of Peace Research* 37:1 (January 2000): 51-68; Carol Cohn, *Women and Wars* (Cambridge: Polity 2012).

democracies like Germany, where the female head of state did not decide to go to war, even when she was surrounded by all-boys-clubs. These criticisms point to the fact that the reality of gender is much more complex than the study is able to cover. A future study might include even more individual and – above all – intersectional context. Whether a leader she has a military background, or a feminist history, or if she is part of a minority group may be driving factors behind her decision to begin war. These variables would be worth taking into account.

The impressive study of Schramm and Stark breaks multiple new theoretical, methodological, and empirical ground. It is a cornucopia of creative and inspiring thoughts, many of which are worthy of more work and exploration.

Dr **Manuela Scheuermann** is a researcher and lecturer at the Institute for Political Science and Sociology at Julius-Maximilians-University Wuerzburg, Vicepresident of the “Gesellschaft fuer Sicherheitspolitik” (Association for Security Policy), and Board Member of the German United Nations Association. She is also the editor and author of “Gender Roles in Peace and Security. Prevent, Protect, Participate” (together with Anja Zuern, Springer 2020). Her current research projects involve Women, Peace and Security in times of Corona crises and gender stereotypes in peace and security.

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