Javier Jesús Macossay-Hernández

Professor Patrick James

Introduction to International Relations

April 27, 2017

**Third Wave Feminism in Joan of Arc and Éowyn’s Battles**

This paper will show how Joan of Arc, Roman Catholic saint and a heroine of France, and Éowyn, niece of King Théoden of Rohan, used third wave feminism concepts to overcome gender roles. Feminist theory uses gender-sensitive lenses to analyze and find unconventional explanations to International Relations problems. Since the 1980s, third wave feminism has focused on how gender norms impact men and women’s daily lives, ethnicity, class, postcolonial status, religion, or disability (Ruane and James, 2012). This paper will explain the background of each character, followed by their different roles during battles. Next, they will be related to each other in the context of the idea of how social class and ethnicity impacts their experiences. After understanding their experiences in war at the Individual Level, the discussion will analyze war’s effect in Middle-earth and Medieval France using the other two Levels of Analysis, System Level and State Level, to better understand third wave feminism.

Éowyn is a character from the Lord of the Rings. She is the daughter of Éomund, a highly ranked Rohan military officer, and Theodwyn, King Théoden’s sister. She also has an older brother named Éomer. Both of her parents died when she was young. Éomund was murdered in a battle and her mother died soon thereafter. Therefore, the King of Rohan raised the siblings as his children. Growing up she became a skilled swordswoman and asked her uncle, the king, to join him and the Riders of Rohan in the battle against Mordor to defend Minas Tirith in Gondor. Éowyn had nothing to lose because if Rohan’s army lost, Mordor forces would either slaughter or rule Rohan’s citizens. However, her uncle denied the request. King Théoden told his niece that if he died in the battlefield, she would become the Queen of Rohan. Nevertheless, his response is illogical because he sent to war his son, who died in a battle, and Éowyn’s older brother. It is clear to the audience that Théoden questioned her physical strength. She opted for disobeying her uncle and joined the Rider’s of Rohan.

Joan of Arc was born in the small rural town of Domremy, France in 1412. Her parents were farmers who practiced Roman Catholic religion. Joan had a normal peasant life until Archangel Michael appeared to her. He instructed the teenager to defeat the English army that occupied Orléans to recover French territory, drive the enemy out of France, and have the heir of France crowned in the cathedral of Reims (Edmunds, 2008). Although Joan was a faithful Catholic, she ignored Saint Michael’s commands. It took multiple appearances for her to accept and seek support from the local lord to meet the heir of France because she wanted to personally deliver Saint Michael’s message. The local lord denied her request, but Joan persisted and visited him until he agreed to help her fulfill her mission. She had a similar experience trying to convince France’s heir because he sent her to his theologians to determine if the message was of divine or satanic inspiration. After Joan successfully passed the interrogatories, the future king was still not satisfied by the story that brought her to start her military quest. Additionally, he doubted about her offensive capabilities, so he used her as an image to recruit troops by promoting God’s will to recover their territory and drive out the English troops. He succeeded because France was a fervent Catholic country.

There are differences between them that influenced their lives during and after the battles. Both went to the battlefront dressed as men. In the case of Joan of Arc, knight’s armors were designed for men in Medieval France. Éowyn dressed as a man because she did not want her uncle to notice she joined the riders. Another difference is that Éowyn fought against the Orcs and the Uruk-hai. In addition, she killed the Lord of Nazgûl because he was going to murder her uncle. In contrast, Joan of Arc did not fight against the English. She saw multiple battles from a reasonable distance. Joan had a psychological influence while Éowyn had a physical influence in the battle. Joan did not join the battle because she did not have military training. In addition to her lack of training, she did not have an education. Joan’s uneducated socioeconomic background had a direct impact in her experience during and after war.

Joan lived in the countryside. Therefore, education was not accessible to her. In contrast, Éowyn grew up in a castle with luxuries, education, and sword training. Due to her diverse set of military skills, she was able protect her uncle from the enemy. Furthermore, Éowyn was not punished when they discovered her true identity because she had political power. Unfortunately for Joan, the English captured her. Then, the Church, supported by the English, did a trial based on interrogations in an attempt to find her guilty of any possible crime. Joan’s family was not wealthy; therefore, they could not negotiate her liberation. Besides, the king was not interested in saving her life. The Church found her guilty of witchcraft and burned her alive. Although both young women’s support was crucial for the armies to succeed, Joan of Arc was not rewarded by her efforts and sacrifices.

Besides their social differences and their gender-based similarities, ethnicity influenced their experience in the military. A military uniform is a unifying homogenous force that erases the effects of class and gender. The only aspect of a soldier that cannot be disguised is the skin color. Despite Joan and Éowyn are women; they are part of the ethnic majority in their military forces. Therefore, skin color allowed them to blend into the homogenous military. Social constructions on gender, social class, and ethnicity limits the possibility to unleash someone’s full potential because it imposes mental barriers and reinforces stereotypes. As the same way constructivism affects an individual’s experience, it affects at the State and the System Level.

At the State Level, most of the political entities are male-dominated in Middle-earth. Furthermore, women are mostly presented as wives or relatives of the political leaders. Unfortunately, females are not the main characters in the story line. In the case of the dwarf community, females do not appear in any of the movies. At the System Level, the Fellowship of the Ring is represented by dominant male figures, males who have physical and emotional strength. Additionally, the Fellowship, which can be perceived by the audience as an international organization, excluded males of less dominant ethnic groups. In Middle-earth, Hobbits are not considered dominant figures; however, the other members of the Fellowship made an exception and invited the Hobbits in the decision making process because Frodo protected the ring.

In Medieval France, female leadership did not exist at the State and the System Level. Head of state monarchs were males and, as in Middle-earth, females who were monarchs and had political power often followed the orders of a King, Duke, or Lord. This form of female dependency on males existed at the System Level as well. Nowadays, anarchy at the System Level exists because of the lack of an international government, but in Medieval Europe the Church was the international government. The Roman Catholic Church had political power because monarchs practiced Catholicism. Therefore, bishops and priests influenced political leaders. Church representatives who took political decisions in collaboration with monarchs were male priests. As the Hobbits in Middle-earth, religious men who had less political power, mostly monks, were excluded in the Church’s process of making a decision. In the Roman Catholic tradition, monks and nuns lose the freedom of making their own decisions when they make the religious vows of obedience to their community. In order to gain authority within their communities, they have to move up the ecclesiastical hierarchy, as in Middle-earth.

Third wave feminism helps us understand the differences among women’s individual experiences. Some of these differences are based on ethnicity, social class, religion, and other factors. Additionally, gender-sensitive lenses understand war and postwar effects on women and unprivileged individuals. Furthermore, some males are oppressed because of their feminized roles in society based on social constructions, lack of physical, mental, or emotional strength. Joan of Arc and Éowyn are a perfect example on how two women who joined the military and went to war had simultaneously similar and different experiences and outcomes based on the aforementioned factors. Both young women had difficulties trying to join the military due to gender roles; however, they defied the barriers imposed to them. Gender roles have been challenged as society has progressed. Currently, the United States allows women to join the United States Armed Forces. Nevertheless, would mixed gender combat units perform better than all male units? How does the integration of women to the military will positively enhance a military campaign in the battlefield and in intelligent operations?

**References**

Edmunds, J.M. (2008). *The mission of joan of arc*. Forest Row: Temple Lodge.

Warner, M. (1981). *Joan of arc: The image of female heroism.* New York: Knopf.

Ruane, A. E. & James, P. (2012). *The international relations of middle-earth: Learning from*

*the lord of the rings*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Mathijs, E. (2006). *The lord of the rings: Popular culture in global context.* New York:

Wallflower.