

RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Family values? Sexism and heteronormativity in Feminist Evolutionary Analytic (FEA) research

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## Abstract

In this article, we focus on the subset of evolutionary theorising self-identified as Feminist Evolutionary Analytic (FEA) within security studies and International Relations. We offer this accounting in four sections. First, we provide a brief overview of the argument that reproductive interests are the ‘origins’ of international violence. Second, we break down the definitions of gender, sex, and sexuality used in evolutionary work in security studies generally and in FEA specifically, demonstrating a lack of complexity in FEA’s accounts of the potential relations among the three and critiquing their essentialist heteronormative assumptions. Third, we argue that FEA’s failure to reflect on the history and context of evolutionary theorising, much less contemporary feminist critiques, facilitates its forwarding of the state and institutions as primarily neutral and corrective bulwarks against male violence. Fourth, we conclude by outlining what is at stake if we fail to correct for this direction in feminist, IR, and security research. We argue that FEA work misrepresents and narrows the potential for understanding and responding to violence, facilitating the continued instrumentalisation of women’s rights, increased government regulation of sexuality, and a more expansive form of militarism.

**Keywords:** Gender; Evolution; Feminism; War; Conflict; Terrorism

## Introduction

Are the causes of violence rooted in sex and gender relations bound by evolutionary forces? Security studies scholars who rely on evolutionary biology and evolutionary psychology contend that they are. They argue that there is an evolutionary basis for violence and war, attributable to male competition for sex with females.<sup>1</sup> We suggest that the idea that national and international conflict has an ‘origin’ in ‘male-female conflict over reproduction’ requires an uncomplicated (and inaccurate) assessment of sex and of gender, leading to a host of problematic assumptions and recommendations for policy practice.<sup>2</sup> We also argue that the simplified importation of some of the insights of evolutionary biology and evolutionary psychology into International Relations (IR), especially as they concern sex, sexuality, gender, and reproduction, leads to highly suspect operationalisations of sex and unavoidable reliance on heterosexual reproduction and filiation, as

<sup>1</sup>See, for example, Bradley A. Thayer, ‘Bringing in Darwin’, *International Security*, 25:2 (2000), pp. 124–51; Azar Gat, ‘So why do people fight? Evolutionary theory and the causes of war’, *European Journal of International Relations*, 15:4 (2009), pp. 571–99; Valerie Hudson, Bonnie Ballif-Spanvill, Mary Caprioli, and Chad F. Emmett, *Sex and World Peace* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

<sup>2</sup>Valerie Hudson, Donna Lee Bowen, and Perpetua Lynne Nielsen, ‘What is the relationship between inequity in family law and violence against women?’, *Politics & Gender*, 7:4 (2011), pp. 453–92.

well as the state's regulation of each.<sup>3</sup> Thus, while its proponents claim that evolutionary science constitutes a 'scientific meta-theoretical paradigm designed to understand human nature' with no 'political agenda', we argue that this paradigm builds on normatively and practically problematic premises and, as a result, impoverishes the range of potential responses to violence and inequality.<sup>4</sup>

In this article, we focus on the subset of evolutionary theorising self-identified as Feminist Evolutionary Analytic (FEA). As coined by Valerie Hudson and her co-authors, FEA is the product of a constellation of security studies scholars, such as Rose McDermott, Bradley Thayer, and Mary Caprioli who, along with Hudson, link the insights of evolutionary psychology and biology to the study of violence from an explicitly feminist perspective.<sup>5</sup> We focus on FEA for two reasons. First, it is influential. FEA is referenced in the halls of the United Nations, promulgated in the opinion pages of the *New York Times*, invoked in the *Washington Post* as justifying mainstreaming gender in foreign policy, celebrated by the feminist Gloria Steinem, and increasingly cited in security studies research on the causes of violence.<sup>6</sup> Second, distinct from other uses of evolutionary theorising in security studies, FEA scholars claim to provide a path to ending violence; namely through gender equality.<sup>7</sup> FEA scholars argue that promoting women's cultural, legal, and institutional equality can alter the acceptance and licensing of male (evolutionary) violence, the primary cause of conflict.

We agree with the goals of gender equality and reducing violence. However, we see an inherent contradiction in FEA's arguments. FEA scholars advocate gender equality and strong family law as a means to alter something (male propensity for violence) that they contend remains the biological 'ultimate cause' of that violence.<sup>8</sup> As an analytic, FEA's opposition to violence in international politics is not disputed. But, its basis in a reductive understanding of change and a binary account of gender is deeply problematic. This, we argue, leads to counterproductive and misguided policies, such as FEA's 'Responsibility to Protect Women' linked to the establishment of a list of 'state sponsors of gender terror'.<sup>9</sup> As FEA achieves a greater public profile, evinced by a recent opinion piece in the *New York Times* reminding President Trump

<sup>3</sup>The argument that states' involvement in reproduction is essentialist is not new here. See, for example, Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation* (London: Sage, 1998); Jacqueline Stevens, *Reproducing the State* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999); V. Spike Peterson, *A Critical Rewriting of the Global Political Economy* (New York: Psychology Press, 2003); and V. Spike Peterson, 'Political identities/nationalism as heterosexism', *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 1:1 (1999), pp. 34–65. For recent applications, see V. Spike Peterson, 'Sex matters: a queer history of hierarchies', *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 16:3 (2014), pp. 389–409; Anna Weissman, 'Repronormativity and the reproduction of the nation-state: the state and sexuality collide', *Journal of GLBT Family Studies*, 13:3 (2017), pp. 277–305; and Swati Parashar, J. Ann Tickner, and Jacqui True (eds), *Revisiting Gendered States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018). Our interest is in the specific relationship between this analysis and evolutionary theorising, specifically FEA.

<sup>4</sup>It is not that the claim is political that we find problematic. Nor is it the potential uses of biology, *per se*, as providing a purchase on politics. Rather, as we explain throughout, it is the particular political implications of this work as deployed to structure policy. See David Buss and David Schmitt, 'Evolutionary psychology and feminism', *Sex Roles*, 64:9–10 (2011), pp. 768–87.

<sup>5</sup>Hudson, Bowen, and Nielsen, 'What is the relationship?'

<sup>6</sup>See, for example, Virginia Bouvier, *Gender and the Role of Women in Colombia's Peace Process* (New York: UN Women, 2016); Joshua Busby and Heather Hurlburt, 'Do women matter to national security?', *Washington Post* (2 February 2017); and Gloria Steinem, 'Gloria Steinem discusses sex & world peace', *Early Bird Books* (28 April 2015), available at: {<https://earlybirdbooks.com/sex-world-peace-valerie-hudson>}.

<sup>7</sup>See, for example, Hudson, Bowen, and Nielsen, 'What is the relationship?'; Valerie Hudson *et al.*, *Sex and World Peace*; Rose McDermott, 'A feminist scientific approach to the analysis of politics and gender', *Politics and Gender*, 9:1 (2013), pp. 110–15.

<sup>8</sup>Hudson, Bowen, and Nielsen, 'What is the relationship?', p. 455. Evolutionary biology and psychology provide an account of 'the ultimate causes of human behavior in terms of natural selection'. See Valerie M. Hudson, Mary Caprioli, Bonnie Ballif-Spanvill, Rose McDermott, and Chad Fife Emmett, 'The heart of the matter', *International Security*, 33:3 (2008), pp. 7–45 (p. 12). Oppression is 'selected' though 'not genetically determinant'. Hudson, Bowen, and Nielsen, 'What is the relationship?', p. 468.

<sup>9</sup>Hudson *et al.*, *Sex and World Peace*, p. 155.

and Secretary of State Tillerson that ‘women’s rights are tied directly to national security’, it is all the more crucial to subject FEA and its claim to provide a theory of the causes of and solutions to violence to sustained critical engagement.

We offer this accounting in four sections. First, we provide a brief overview of the argument that reproductive interests are the ‘origins’ of violence. Second, we break down the essentialist and heteronormative understandings of gender, sex, and sexuality forwarded by FEA.<sup>10</sup> Third, we argue that FEA’s claim to provide a ‘social’ solution to a putatively ‘biological’ problem lacks historical and substantive context, leading to the mistaken identification of the state and institutions as primarily neutral and corrective bulwarks against male violence. We conclude by outlining what is at stake if we fail to correct for this direction in feminist, IR, and security research.

### Reproductive interests and the origins of violence

Evolutionary approaches to explaining political behaviour are growing both in popularity and complexity.<sup>11</sup> Proponents suggest that the comparative advantages of evolutionary approaches include accounting for change,<sup>12</sup> evaluating psychology,<sup>13</sup> providing causal depth and precision,<sup>14</sup> and demonstrating the relevance of biology to the social sciences.<sup>15</sup> One of the most common applications of this approach seeks to explain the causes of violence.

Most basically, according to evolutionary theorising, humans have two instinctual drives – for survival (food, water, and sometimes shelter) and for reproductive success. Both inspire competition among men. Men compete over scarce essential resources and scarce access to preferable women for reproduction. In this story, men (who can afford promiscuity because sperm are cheap) look to mate with the ‘best’ women, and compete (often violently, but always aggressively) for them. The salient feature and fundamental difference of men and women is their sex-specific role in reproduction; namely, men aggressively compete and women receptively reproduce.

Thus, Azar Gat argues global politics is fuelled by ‘the struggle for reproduction’.<sup>16</sup> This struggle, which involves competitive ‘access to sexual partners of reproductive potential’, is a condition of possibility both for war and for gender-based violence. Thayer suggests that warfare contributes to states’ fitness in a Darwinian sense because victors attain ‘status, coalition allies, and members of the opposite sex’, with whom they may reproduce.<sup>17</sup> Consequently, forms of ‘[d]eadly violence ... [are] ... regularly activated by competition over women.’<sup>18</sup> This interpretation of sex-specific roles in reproduction suggests that because ‘natural selection will eventually “phase” out genotypes or traits that minimize reproductive success’ while preserving and

<sup>10</sup>This suggestion that security studies work that relies on evolutionary biology oversimplifies sex, gender, and sexuality is not an argument that evolutionary biology itself necessarily does. Joan Roughgarden, ‘Evolution and the embodiment of gender’, *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 10:2 (2004), pp. 287–91 and Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), cited herein as critics of dichotomous understandings of sex and gender, as well as of sex selection narrowly defined, are evolutionary biologists suggesting sophisticated understandings of sex and gender.

<sup>11</sup>Anthony Lopez and Rose McDermott, ‘Adaptation, heritability, and the emergence of evolutionary political science’, *Political Psychology*, 33:3 (2012), pp. 343–62.

<sup>12</sup>George Modelski and Kazimierz Poznanski, ‘Evolutionary paradigms in the social sciences’, *International Studies Quarterly*, 49:3 (1996), pp. 315–19.

<sup>13</sup>Anthony Lopez and Rose McDermott, ‘Adaptation, heritability, and the emergence of evolutionary political science’, *Political Psychology*, 33:3 (2012), pp. 343–62.

<sup>14</sup>Peter Hatemi and Rose McDermott, ‘A neurobiological approach to foreign policy analysis’, *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 8:2 (2012), pp. 111–29; David Goetze and Patrick James, ‘Evolutionary psychology and the explanation of ethnic phenomena’, *Evolutionary Psychology*, 2:1 (2004), pp. 142–59.

<sup>15</sup>John Hibbing, ‘Ten misconceptions concerning neurobiology and politics’, *Perspectives on Politics*, 11:2 (2013), pp. 475–89.

<sup>16</sup>Gat, ‘So why do people fight?’, p. 575.

<sup>17</sup>Bradley Thayer, *Darwin and International Relations* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2009), p. 108.

<sup>18</sup>Gat, ‘So why do people fight?’, p. 582.

favouring traits that maximise reproductive success, those who are most aggressive are more likely to survive.<sup>19</sup> As a result, competition for women explains conflict among states.<sup>20</sup>

That is why Bradley Thayer suggests that evolutionary biology can confirm and deepen realist hypotheses about how conflict works.<sup>21</sup> Thayer compares hegemonic states to alpha male gorillas, suggesting that 'dominant' states worry about 'challenges' and therefore will 'kill other males, or drive them off'.<sup>22</sup> He means this comparison literally (not metaphorically), using evolutionary biology's interpretation of males' collective need for reproductive success to posit that war is caused by competition for access to women. Relatedly, Thayer and Hudson contend 'that the life sciences can offer insights into suicide terrorism in the Islamic context' because 'suicide terrorism as a cultural practice could not exist without ... evolutionary motivations'.<sup>23</sup> According to Thayer and Hudson, (presumed male) suicide bombers are driven by a combination of the lack of reproductive opportunities for non-alpha males in this life and the expectation of access to virgins to achieve reproductive success in the next life.<sup>24</sup> They argue that these evolutionary pressures, compounded by female scarcity due to polygyny, make 'becoming a shaheed the most effective response to the human evolutionary conundrum' in much of the Islamic world.<sup>25</sup> David Goetze and Patrick James take this analysis one step further, suggesting that male martyrs are not only looking for individual reproductive success in the next life, but are also looking to contribute to the reproductive success of others of their kind in this life.<sup>26</sup>

Other IR scholars have explicitly challenged some of the underlying assumptions of the 'application' of evolutionary work to global politics. Some have argued that the importation of evolutionary theorising relies on flawed biological logics and/or misinterpretations of evolutionary psychology.<sup>27</sup> Others voice concerns that this work underspecifies basic key concepts (environments, populations, and individuals), and is unclear on notions of random variation, selection, and inheritance.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, Duncan Bell notes how evolutionary IR theorising 'either effaces or erases' the complexity of international political processes, comparing it to Social Darwinism in its tendency 'to naturalize a particular political objective'.<sup>29</sup> Feminist work on reproduction brings into question many of the assumptions inherent in evolutionary security theorising.<sup>30</sup> However, none of these scholars' critiques explicitly analyse the interpretation of sex, gender, and sexuality forwarded by security studies evolutionary theorising or integrate the debates within the history of evolutionary theorising in their critique. Moreover, none have subjected FEA to sustained analysis nor drawn out its implication for international politics.

Yet, FEA's specific importation and interpretation of evolutionary theorising and its explicit policy recommendations are precarious and flawed foundations upon which to predicate either peace or equality. In particular, we argue that FEA's interpretation of evolutionary theorising grounds what is, in the end, a highly disquieting conception of the *link between heterosexual reproduction and state regulation which, in turn, justifies expansive and martial state powers.*

<sup>19</sup>Peter Hatemi and Rose McDermott (eds), *Man is by Nature a Political Animal* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2011), p. 24.

<sup>20</sup>Thayer, *Darwin and International Relations*; Gat, 'So why do people fight?'

<sup>21</sup>Thayer, 'Bringing in Darwin'.

<sup>22</sup>Thayer, *Darwin and International Relations*, p. 20.

<sup>23</sup>Bradley A. Thayer and Valerie Hudson, 'Sex and the shaheed', *International Security*, 4:1 (2010), pp. 37–62.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 44, 51.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>26</sup>Goetze and James, 'Evolutionary psychology', pp. 154, 155.

<sup>27</sup>Evan Charney and William English, 'Genopolitics and the science of genetics', *American Political Science Review*, 107:2 (2013), pp. 382–95.

<sup>28</sup>Lilach Gilady and Matthew Hoffmann, 'Darwin's finches or Lamarck's giraffes, does International Relations get evolution wrong?', *International Studies Review*, 15:3 (2013), pp. 307–27.

<sup>29</sup>Duncan Bell, 'Beware of false prophets', *International Affairs*, 82:3 (2006), pp. 493–510 (pp. 495, 501–02).

<sup>30</sup>For evolutionary security theorising, see, for example, work cited in fn. 10.

### Sex, gender, sexuality in FEA

FEA proponents Valerie Hudson and her co-authors argue that ‘we can no longer speak of achieving national and international security without speaking, in the same breath, about the security of women’.<sup>31</sup> The links between these concepts, they argue, have been overlooked because the evidence provided lacks ‘acceptable conventional empirical warrant’ and ‘hard data’.<sup>32</sup> Consequently, the turn to evolutionary theory functions in their work as an explanatory move, and, as the authors make clear, an explicit justificatory one – providing the ‘ontological foundation’ for both rational actor models and policy credibility.<sup>33</sup> Still, their depiction of existing scholarship *and* their reframed evolutionary account is highly contested and relies on a narrow understanding of both evidence and data.<sup>34</sup>

FEA, in agreement with security studies evolutionary theorising, invokes the ‘primal character of violent patriarchy’ as both the cause and outcome of gender inequality.<sup>35</sup> The description of patriarchy as ‘primal’ derives from a specific understanding of sex, while violent patriarchy is grounded in a particular interpretation of gender. Work that uses sex as an explanation for violence characterises sex as an empirically measurable proxy for gender, and then defines gender equality as ‘the equality between the genders and between the sexes’, such that sex and gender mirror, or can be taken as each other because gender simply lays over sex as the ‘natural’, and ‘self-evident’ substrate.<sup>36</sup> Gender is both taken for and rooted in the predicate of a self-evident sex, while sex is construed as a dichotomous, oppositional category. Both sex and gender identification are presumed clear, coherent, complete, and whole.

In this formulation, the dichotomies of masculine: feminine, male: female, man: woman, penis: vagina, and sperm: egg describe the same thing. Unlike the work of other security studies evolutionary theorists, such as Gat,<sup>37</sup> who use sex and gender interchangeably, FEA scholars look to distinguish gender from sex even as they are measured the same way. In FEA, gender accounts for the non-material (for example, the cultural or the social), while sex accounts for the material (for example, the biological or the natural). In this rendering, sex remains transparent, stable, and easily intelligible. This work relies on a system of separate but complementary sex the emergence of which is dated to the eighteenth century.<sup>38</sup> FEA scholars argue that certain behaviours are heritable (aggression, male promiscuity), but do not show in any precise detail how this is so, while also simultaneously assuming that the function or meaning of contemporary traits are the same as they were in the evolutionary past. In her assessment of evolutionary psychology, Janet Hyde writes: the ‘basic arguments are that evolution occurred over millions of years, and, voila, we have a certain pattern of gender differences in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. But, evolution can act only through genes ... evolutionary psychology fails to specify which genes ... are responsible for the patterns.’<sup>39</sup> Therefore, not only is the imposition of a two-sex system historically anachronistic, but even by the terms of their own arguments they are unable to explain its persistence.

<sup>31</sup>Hudson *et al.*, *Sex and World Peace*.

<sup>32</sup>Hudson *et al.*, ‘The heart of the matter’.

<sup>33</sup>Hatemi and McDermott (eds), *Man is by Nature a Political Animal*, p. 4.

<sup>34</sup>See Laura Sjoberg, Kelly Kadera, and Cameron G. Thies, ‘Reevaluating gender and IR scholarship’, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 62:4 (2018), pp. 848–70, in response to Dan Reiter, ‘The positivist study of gender and International Relations’, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 59:7 (2015), pp. 1301–26.

<sup>35</sup>Hudson *et al.*, *Sex and World Peace*, p. 91.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>37</sup>Gat, ‘So why do people fight?’, p. 575.

<sup>38</sup>Thomas Walter Laqueur, *Making Sex* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990).

<sup>39</sup>Janet Shibley Hyde, *Half the Human Experience* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 2012), p. 35; see also Evelyn Fox Keller, *The Mirage of a Space between Nature and Nurture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010); Gopika Solanki, ‘The retelling of tales’, *Politics & Gender*, 9:1 (2013), pp. 105–10.



Putting aside for a moment the significant point of the historical specificity of the emergence of a binary sex system FEA anachronistically takes as originating in the early Pleistocene era, Peter Hatemi and Rose McDermott explain the reasoning of FEA:

While it may be possible to socially influence one's sexual identity or gender roles, it is certainly impossible to socialize ovaries and childbearing on to a male, or sperm production onto a female. Using biology and the human organism as a potential starting point for universal human similarities as well as individual differences, a biological model can offer answers for why sex provides variation in addition to 'gendered' socialization.<sup>40</sup>

Notably, conditions of and responses to intersex, for example, sex chromosome mosaicism, demonstrate that we, in fact, do 'socialize' the 'impossibility' of such against evidence otherwise.<sup>41</sup> For example, 'a genetic (XY) male with an "inadequate penis" (one that a physician believes will be incapable of penetrating a female's vagina) is made female even if it means destroying his reproductive capacity'.<sup>42</sup> Further, childbearing and ovaries are not necessarily linked, but are socialised to be linked, that is, all women are considered 'potentially pregnant', while 'histories of endocrinology research demonstrate understandings of ovaries and testicles – what they are and what they do hormonally – were explicitly "socialized" to be oppositional rather than continuous'.<sup>43</sup> Notwithstanding this evidence, within FEA sex is held to be self-evident and a biological model is a neutral heuristic for understanding it. Consequently, FEA argues that sex provides a universal and dichotomous explanation – females have fundamental commonalities, as do males, and can be differentiated from each other on the basis of such while remaining homologous to each kind.

In evolutionary theorising, the size and number of the respective gamete, with eggs larger and fewer in comparison with the smaller and more numerous sperm, is the premise of sex-based difference.<sup>44</sup> Gamete size establishes the basis for defining sex, and results in a fundamental asymmetry between the sexes, with males allocating resources to mating and females to offspring. This transpires because eggs are more time-consuming and sperm is cheap; therefore, men (who are investing less) will engage in competition with other men to have sex with women, while women will be more selective.<sup>45</sup> Further, because 'copulation costing the male virtually nothing may trigger a nine-month investment by the female, then the original costlier investment on the part of women will be protected by greater allocation of resources to offspring'.<sup>46</sup> As a result, 'female reproduction is limited by access to resources while male reproduction is limited by access to mates'.<sup>47</sup> For this reason, one of the founding evolutionary theorists, Robert Trivers, called women the 'limiting sex'.<sup>48</sup> It is this limit of potential mates – which rests on the unexamined dual predicate of scarcity of females and self-interest maximising males – that necessitates and promotes violence. Embedded within this explanation is the antecedent postulate that sex is only binary (only males and females exist) and sexuality is functionally reproductive.

<sup>40</sup>Hatemi and McDermott (eds), *Man is by Nature a Political Animal*, p. 19.

<sup>41</sup>Elizabeth Reis, *Bodies in Doubt* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009).

<sup>42</sup>Paisley Currah, Richard M. Juang, and Shannon Price Minter (eds), *Transgender Rights* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), p. 52.

<sup>43</sup>Sari Irni, 'Steroid provocations', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 41:3 (2016), pp. 507–29; Julian Gill-Peterson, 'The technical capacities of the body', *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly*, 1:3 (2014), pp. 402–18.

<sup>44</sup>Todd Shackelford and Viviana Weekes-Shackelford (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Evolutionary Perspectives on Violence, Homicide, and War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>45</sup>David Buss and David Schmitt, 'Evolutionary psychology and feminism', *Sex Roles*, 64:9–10 (2011), pp. 768–87; David Buss (ed.), *The Handbook of Evolutionary Psychology* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2005).

<sup>46</sup>Robert Trivers, *Natural Selection and Social Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 74.

<sup>47</sup>Buss (ed.), *The Handbook of Evolutionary Psychology*, p. 689.

<sup>48</sup>Trivers, *Natural Selection and Social Theory*, p. 68.

Joan Roughgarden takes explicit issue with this reading of evolutionary theorising.<sup>49</sup> Her critique is threefold. First, while she agrees that ‘in biology, male function and female function are unproblematically defined in terms of gamete size’, there is no necessary correlation or causation with behaviour nor does it necessarily qualify the organism as either male or female. Second, she argues that the ‘expensive egg cheap sperm principle’ is an error based on ‘an accounting mistake that Darwin did not make’.<sup>50</sup> Third, therefore, ‘social violence is not nature’s baseline state, but a special case of failing to strike a successful bargain ... for access to reproductive opportunity’.<sup>51</sup> She, along with others,<sup>52</sup> challenges this interpretation of anisogamy (a form of sexual reproduction with two differently sized gametes) as identifying sex, explaining sexual practice, and predicting social organisation, underscoring that interpretations of sex and the heuristics by which we grasp it are neither self-evident or neutral, but are highly contested and partial. In other words, the simple narrative of evolutionary theory invoked by FEA as settled is, in fact, deeply debated.

It is precisely this point that Bradley Thayer misses in his response to Duncan Bell and Paul MacDonald’s critique of his ‘sociobiological’ work. He sees his assumptions as objective science.<sup>53</sup> Likewise, McDermott states: ‘natural selection is not a theory; it is a fact’, and therefore not up for critique or debate *even when* evolutionary scientists themselves debate it.<sup>54</sup> This is Mary Poovey’s specific critique of the modern invocation of ‘fact’; namely, that it has ‘come to be seen as pre-interpretive or even somehow non-interpretive at the same time that they have become the bedrock for systematic knowledge’.<sup>55</sup> Our argument is not against the existence of natural or sexual selection, it is about how it is interpreted and used. After all, it is precisely this evidence of complexity, variation, or contestation FEA specifically reads out of its accounts that makes its implications so dire. In the following three subsections, we analyse FEA’s use of sex, gender, and sexuality to illustrate this point, building on literature from feminist theory, evolutionary biology, and social policy, among others. We provide an original analysis of the theoretical foundations of FEA to demonstrate that its claim to offer an ‘ultimate cause’ of male violence and, thus, gender inequality is rooted in a fundamentally oversimplified understanding of sex, gender, and sexuality which leads to flawed policies for world peace.<sup>56</sup>

## Sex

FEA’s evolutionary relationship among sex, gender, sexuality, and violence relies upon sex as discrete, binary, and self-evident. Gender is related to sex but does not affect FEA’s understanding of sex itself, which remains unaffected by and prior to gender. This presumption of sex as the substrate or foundation of gender has been actively and consistently critiqued by scholars who suggest that what we know about sex is, indeed, gendered from the start.<sup>57</sup> Demonstrating

<sup>49</sup>Roughgarden, ‘Evolution and the embodiment of gender’.

<sup>50</sup>Joan Roughgarden, *Evolution’s Rainbow* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), p. 168; Ruth Hubbard, *The Politics of Women’s Biology* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1990), p. 11; Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), p. 183.

<sup>51</sup>Roughgarden, *Evolution’s Rainbow*, p. 178; Agustin Fuentes, ‘It’s not all sex and violence’, *American Anthropologist*, 106:4 (2004), pp. 710–18.

<sup>52</sup>Douglas P. Fry, ‘Life without war’, *Science*, 336:6083 (2013), pp. 879–84; Sarah Blaffer Hrdy, *Mothers and Others* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011); Anna Weissman, ‘Sex, sexuality, reproduction, and international security’, in Caron Gentry, Laura Shepherd, and Laura Sjoberg (eds), *Routledge Handbook on Gender and Security* (London: Routledge, 2018).

<sup>53</sup>Duncan Bell, Paul K. MacDonald, and Bradley A. Thayer, ‘Start the evolution without us’, *International Security*, 26:1 (2001), pp. 187–98.

<sup>54</sup>McDermott, ‘A feminist scientific approach’, p. 113.

<sup>55</sup>Mary Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. xii.

<sup>56</sup>Hudson, Bowen, and Nielsen, ‘What is the relationship?’, p. 464.

<sup>57</sup>Judith Butler, ‘Revisiting bodies and pleasures’, *Theory, Culture & Society*, 16:2 (1999), pp. 11–20; Hyde, *Half the Human Experience*; Sarah Richardson, *Sex Itself* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2013); Evelyn Fox Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985); Myra Hird, ‘Considerations for a psychoanalytic theory of gender identity and sexual desire’, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 28:4 (2003), pp. 1067–92.

how our understanding of sex and sex difference is a complex intersectional event shaped as much by scientists as these scholars are shaped by it – they critique the ways in which sex is organised and interpreted according to extant discourses of gender, which (still) insist on a discrete and binary distinction.<sup>58</sup>

For one, non-human species contain polymorphisms of feminine males, masculine females, masculine males, and feminine females all together, and/or gender-crossing behaviour.<sup>59</sup> Likewise, there exists in human cultures multiple categories of individuals, for example, the *kothi*, *hijra*, *sarimbavy*, or *twin-spirited*, who embody variation and manifestation of non-binary and non-aligned sex and gender expressions.<sup>60</sup> Anne Fausto-Sterling draws on historical evidence to argue that the presumption of dimorphic sex is enforced by disappearing ‘people of mixed sex’, in part through ‘scientific methods (which) classified them out of existence’.<sup>61</sup> This is because ‘the possession of a [single] sex is a necessity for our social order’, therefore ‘the specter of intersexuality as spurred us to police bodies of indeterminate sex’.<sup>62</sup> As Paisley Currah notes, ‘the notion of embodied genitals’ of ‘dichotomous sexed persons provides a foundation for moral and disciplinary imperatives’ in the service of other goals.<sup>63</sup> One example of this is the demand for binary classification by sex on identity documents and in practice as a means to screen and predict potential threats, most notably at airports and borders, and, therefore, presumably ensure national security.<sup>64</sup> Collectively, what these scholars document is that sex does not stand alone as the ‘unmediated representation of the body itself, and is neither universal or unchanging, undermining the essential predicate upon which FEA theorising depends.’<sup>65</sup> This documentation matters because FEA scholars insist upon a universal dichotomisation of sex which, in turn, informs and justifies a universal dichotomisation of gender.

### Gender

FEA assumes that knowing a person’s sex allows one to know that person’s gender and vice versa. For example, McDermott characterises gender as the ‘predictable psychological consequences’ of sex difference.<sup>66</sup> Notably, by presuming homogeneity and lack of differentiation within categories of sex and gender, and the coherence of sex and gender, FEA often speaks of ‘counterintuitive’ findings of female enforcement/violence against other females.<sup>67</sup> Feminist scholarship has been documenting this for years, because the phenomenon is not counterintuitive if one begins with the possibility that sex/gender identification is not given and does not lead to sex/gender alliance/conformity.<sup>68</sup> As Cordelia Fine *et al.* and others note, arguments such as these evidence a suspect

<sup>58</sup>Daphna Joel and Anne Fausto-Sterling, ‘Beyond sex differences’, *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences*, 371:1688 (2015), 20150451; Buss (ed.), *The Handbook of Evolutionary Psychology*; Jennifer L. Petersen and Janet Hyde, ‘A meta-analytic review of research on gender differences in sexuality, 1993–2007’, *Psychological Bulletin*, 136:1 (2010), pp. 21–38; Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science*.

<sup>59</sup>See Bruce Bagemihl, *Biological Exuberance* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999).

<sup>60</sup>Gopika, ‘The retelling of tales’; Seth Palmer, ‘Asexual inverts and sexual perverts’, *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly*, 1:3 (2014), pp. 368–86.

<sup>61</sup>Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body*, p. 565.

<sup>62</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 733; Palmer, ‘Asexual inverts and sexual perverts’.

<sup>63</sup>Paisley Currah and Lisa Jean Moore, “‘We won’t know who you are’”, *Hypatia*, 24:3 (2009), pp. 113–35.

<sup>64</sup>Paisley Currah and Tara Mulqueen, ‘Securitizing gender: Identity, biometrics, and transgender bodies at the airport’, *Social Research*, 78:2 (2011), pp. 557–82.

<sup>65</sup>Buss (ed.), *The Handbook of Evolutionary Psychology*, p. 557.

<sup>66</sup>McDermott, ‘A feminist scientific approach’, p. 113.

<sup>67</sup>McDermott and Hatemi (eds), *Man is by Nature a Political Animal*.

<sup>68</sup>Laura Sjoberg and Caron E. Gentry, *Mothers, Monsters, Whores* (London: Zed Books, 2007); Caron Gentry and Laura Sjoberg, *Beyond Mothers, Monsters, Whores* (London: Zed Books, 2015); Megan MacKenzie, ‘Securitization and desecuritization’, *Security Studies*, 18:2 (2009), pp. 241–61; Swati Parashar, ‘Feminist International Relations and women militants: Case studies from Sri Lanka and Kashmir’, *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 22:2 (2009), pp. 235–56; Sandra McEvoy, ‘Loyalist women paramilitaries in Northern Ireland’, *Security Studies*, 18:2 (2009), pp. 262–86.



reliance on the presumption that ‘there is a unidirectional, causal pathway from genders to behavior via hormones and brains and that evolution has left us with brains and mental processes strongly reminiscent of our Paleolithic ancestors’.<sup>69</sup> Judith Butler points out, even ‘assuming for the moment the stability of binary sex, it does not follow that the construction of “men” will accrue exclusively to the bodies of males or that “women” will interpret only female bodies’.<sup>70</sup> There are not just males and females, there is also sex/gender diversity and plurality, consequently ‘labelling someone a man or a woman is a social decision’.<sup>71</sup> FEA acknowledges once that there are individuals who ‘reject’ these norms, but treats it as an exception rather than as a fundamental challenge to its logic.<sup>72</sup>

When it comes to differently sexed bodies, ‘exceptions are not there to prove the rule; they have meaning in and of themselves’.<sup>73</sup> Keller notes that recognition of exceptions rejects (sex/gender) ‘division as an epistemological prerequisite’.<sup>74</sup> If sex dichotomy is not necessary, it is possible to understand that neither sex nor gender are given or reinforced by nature, but are instead historical, and political. By insisting upon a divide of sex and gender (the former natural and given, the latter cultural and constructed), FEA work specifically calls upon the normative pairing of nature and sex to buttress the normative pairing of culture and gender, for example, gender follows unproblematically and seamlessly from sex. In this sense, holding gender as separable, but deriving from sex, as FEA must do to root the ultimate cause of violence in the conflict over reproduction while also simultaneously allowing for its modification, institutes a causal relationship (for example, sex determines gender) that is unfounded and deeply problematic.<sup>75</sup> Further, FEA relies upon unified ‘causal or expressive lines of connection among biological sex, culturally constituted genders, and the expression or effect of both in the manifestation of ... sexual practice’.<sup>76</sup> In other words, for FEA the kind of sex one *is* defines the kind of sex one *does*.

### Sexuality

Heterosexual sex in the service of reproduction is the only form of sex FEA recognises. As Betsy Crane and Jesse Crane-Seeber write in their short critique of FEA’s construct of male/female sexuality, FEA ‘makes women’s sexuality appear, if anything, as a source of male jealousy and competition in human sexuality’, and limits women’s sexual agency and value to the extent to which they may, in Luce Irigaray’s terms, bring their sex to the market and control its exchange.<sup>77</sup> In this story, males engage in physical aggression in intrasexual competition for females. Because males seek variety and inherently tend towards polygamy, the number of females will always be insufficient even if males satisfice. Thus, females are perennially fought over and exchanged as commodities who literally and figuratively bear value insofar as they bear children. They are evolution’s conscripts and conduits, all undeniably female, all interested in reproduction, and all inflexibly heterosexual.

<sup>69</sup>Cordelia Fine, Rebecca Jordan-Young, Anelis Kaiser, and Gina Rippon, ‘Plasticity, plasticity, plasticity ... and the rigid problem of sex’, *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 17:11 (2013), pp. 550–1. See also Letitia Meynell, ‘Evolutionary psychology, ethology, and essentialism (because what they don’t know can hurt us)’, *Hypatia*, 27:1 (2012), pp. 3–27.

<sup>70</sup>Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 10.

<sup>71</sup>Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body*, p. 3.

<sup>72</sup>Hudson *et al.*, *Sex and World Peace*, p. 18.

<sup>73</sup>Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science*, p. 163.

<sup>74</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 164.

<sup>75</sup>Hudson *et al.*, *Sex and World Peace*, p. 180.

<sup>76</sup>Judith Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), p. 7.

<sup>77</sup>Betsy Crane and Jesse Crane-Seeber, ‘What does evolution have to do with legal enclaves?’, *Politics & Gender*, 9:1 (2013), pp. 100–05; Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985).

In FEA, sex refers to anatomical identity, to a division of male and female, and sexuality to heterosexual reproduction and filiation. Crane and Crane-Seeber point out how ‘the differential investment hypothesis presumes an exchange of female sexuality for male protection of a “wife” with children, naturalizing monogamous nuclear families’.<sup>78</sup> The assumption that sexual desires and pursuits must be sex-differentiated, heterosexual, and reproductive is deeply embedded in FEA because FEA privileges the heterosexual family as the social solution to biological violence, which, in turn, relies on a necessary and coherent relationship between sex, gender, and sexuality. The basis for world peace is, according to FEA, the normalisation and privileging of the heterosexual, reproductive family.

Recollect, according to FEA, the cause of violence is the evolutionary legacy of reproductive hierarchies of dominance and aggression organised around ‘alpha males’ without heterosexual, reproductive families.<sup>79</sup> FEA consistently refers to heteronormative males and male sexualities as ‘demonic’, aggressive, and combative.<sup>80</sup> This approach presents a toxic picture of masculinity and, as Hudson *et al.* make clear, because of this common evolutionary legacy, we must now consider if and how ‘human collectives are at the mercy of male sex hormones’.<sup>81</sup> Even as Hudson *et al.* are careful to specify that ‘this is not to say that all men are aggressive, or that all men coerce women’, they do not allow this to overturn their essential characterisation of male ‘temperaments’ as ‘biologically predisposed’ to sex-seeking violence.<sup>82</sup>

In this way, though its characterisations of sexuality, FEA naturalises and fixes men and women in relations of domination and subordination through a recourse to reproductive imperatives and resources since ‘human males ... code the primal difference ... as a hierarchy’ where ‘the naturally selected goal is control and domination of the subordinate female’.<sup>83</sup> Consequently, because it draws upon and recapitulates the hierarchy it seeks to repudiate, and once again implicates biology as a form of primal causality, this suggests that the theoretical premise of FEA work not only remains disengaged from other interpretations of reproduction but also negates its claimed potential to serve as a corrective for gender subordination.

To begin, even if it were possible to modify or control for FEA’s ‘primal violent patriarchy’ it remains that sexuality does not work like FEA assumes it does. Male sexuality is not solely promiscuous and heterosexual. Female sexuality is not necessarily conservative *or* heterosexual. People do not have sex only to reproduce. As Jennifer Terry observes, such presumptions relegate any analysis of ‘non-reproductive sexual behaviour ... [to] ... mainly with how it thwarts, disturbs, or, in the best light, merely supplements heterosexual reproduction’.<sup>84</sup> Lee Edelman helps us to identify FEA logic as a form of ‘reproductive futurism’, which not only straightjackets sexual desire into heterosexuality, but also dictates a certain allowable form of heterosexuality – the sort where sex functions for reproductive success.<sup>85</sup> Within this construct, any other forms of sex or sexuality, be it intersex, queer, or non-reproductive, are maladaptive and are destined for failure. Non-reproductive sex may exist, but within evolutionary logics it has no purpose in its perverse ‘sterility’.<sup>86</sup> But if, on the average, men do not want sex with (more) women, all women

<sup>78</sup>Crane and Crane-Seeber, ‘What does evolution have to do with legal enclaves?’, p. 102; See also Meghana Nayak, ‘The false choice between universalism and religion/culture’, *Politics & Gender*, 9:1 (2013), pp. 120–5.

<sup>79</sup>Hudson *et al.*, *Sex and World Peace*, p. 123.

<sup>80</sup>Richard W. Wrangham and Dale Peterson, *Demonic Males: Apes and the Origins of Human Violence* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1996).

<sup>81</sup>Hudson *et al.*, *Sex and World Peace*, p. 46.

<sup>82</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 74. If radical feminists were to say this now (as they did in the late 1970s) we would venture that IR scholarship and national policy would not tarry a moment with such a theory. Yet, FEA repeatedly does to no ill effects – and we suspect it has something to do with their proposed solution.

<sup>83</sup>Valerie Hudson, ‘Sex, war, and peace’, *Political Psychology*, 31:1 (2010), pp. 33–9 (p. 36).

<sup>84</sup>Jennifer Terry, ‘“Unnatural acts” in nature: the scientific fascination with queer animals’, *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 6:2 (2000), pp. 151–93.

<sup>85</sup>Lee Edelman, *No Future* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), p. 2.

<sup>86</sup>Valerie Rohy, ‘On homosexual reproduction’, *differences*, 23:1 (2012), pp. 101–30.

are not selective about sex with men, male mating strategies are not violent, and reproduction is not the goal of all or even most sexual encounters, then the premises of the relationship between heterosexual sex drive and violence begin to wear away.<sup>87</sup>

We see these problems with FEA's understandings of sexuality most clearly in what its proponents identify as the 'First Difference', a poorly specified concept but one that is fundamental to both the explanation of male propensity for violence and its potential solution.<sup>88</sup> Hudson *et al.* explain that the First Difference, or baseline for human differentiation, is a 'universal phenomenon' where 'human beings are divided into two roughly equal-sized groups ... involved in the production of the future of their group in the form of offspring'.<sup>89</sup> According to FEA, the First Difference arises from and contributes to the 'first conflict', which is the 'clash of reproductive interests between males and females'.<sup>90</sup> At both the individual and species level, the First Difference can be attributed to 'women got pregnant and men did not'.<sup>91</sup>

The First Difference is a source of the First Other: 'the very first other that any child experiences is the parent that is not anatomically like them'.<sup>92</sup> It is (embodied) oppositional sex that distinguishes between self and other. This holds true universally and, as such, is a primary and permanent means of organising the world.<sup>93</sup> For men, the First Other is a woman, and for women it is a man, but 'woman' defines the very notion of the First Other.<sup>94</sup> While the First Other and the First Difference appear to be separate from, and antecedent to, culture and society, the primary learning mechanism for understanding and sorting the First Difference is cultural and occurs between fathers and mothers within 'rich families, poor families, in families of different races and different religions, this First Difference is there for every human being born'.<sup>95</sup> The repetition of a heterosexual reproductive logic within constrained and competitive resources and distribution remains, as does a highly particular yet fundamentally unclear formulation of subjectivity and sociality.

FEA work repeatedly cites Jacques Derrida in support of their understanding of the crucial role of difference, despite the fact that Derrida upends the account of the First Difference and has an entirely distinct understanding of the concept of difference itself.<sup>96</sup> As he writes, 'when we speak here of sexual difference, we must distinguish between opposition and difference. Opposition is two, opposition is man/woman. Difference, on the other hand, can be an indefinite number of sexes'.<sup>97</sup> Therefore, FEA's reading of gender as the 'primary formative fixed' difference is precisely contrary to what Derrida argues.<sup>98</sup> After all, Derrida was concerned to deconstruct binary oppositions which, he argued, reduced multiplicities of difference to hierarchical binaries

<sup>87</sup>And, indeed, this appears to be a growing conclusion. See, for example, Ryan Schacht, Kristin Liv Rauch, and Monique Borgerhoff Mulder, 'Too many men', *Trends in Ecology & Evolution*, 29:4 (2014), pp. 214–22; Marlene Zuk, *Sexual Selections* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

<sup>88</sup>Valerie Hudson, 'The Founding Template: Male-Female Relations', Women Peacemakers Program (May 2014), pp. 44–6, available at: {<https://www.womenpeacemakersprogram.org/assets/CMS/May-24-gender-/May-Pack-2014-web.pdf>}.

<sup>89</sup>Valerie Hudson, Donna Lee Bowen, and Perpetua Lynne Nielsen, 'We are not helpless', *PRISM: Journal of the Center for Complex Operations*, 6:1 (2016), pp. 122–39 (p. 129).

<sup>90</sup>Hudson *et al.*, *Sex and World Peace*, p. 71.

<sup>91</sup>Buss (ed.), *The Handbook of Evolutionary Psychology*, p. 156.

<sup>92</sup>Hudson, 'Sex, war, and peace', p. 35.

<sup>93</sup>However, see Oyeronke Oyewumi, 'Family bonds/conceptual binds', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 25:4 (2000), pp. 1093–8, who disputes the claim that genitals organise difference universally.

<sup>94</sup>Hudson, Bowen, and Nielsen, 'We are not helpless'.

<sup>95</sup>Donna Lee Bowen, Valerie M. Hudson, and Perpetua Lynne Nielsen, 'State fragility and structural gender inequality in family law', *Laws*, 4:4 (2015), pp. 654–72.

<sup>96</sup>Hudson *et al.* in *Sex and World Peace* could be read as citing Derrida as a 'supplement' – an addition or substitution to their work, encoding a key to deconstruct the universal presumed and revealing the evolutionary narrative as deeply immersed in the politics of its own making.

<sup>97</sup>Jacques Derrida, *Deconstruction and Philosophy*, ed. John Sallis (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 198.

<sup>98</sup>Hudson *et al.* *Sex and World Peace*, p. 98.

with the masculine/male as primary or first logic, which he calls phallogocentrism – a move FEA makes when identifying male violence as the ultimate *explans* for social order. Further, for Derrida the divide between naturalness and its foils is unsustainable. ‘Nature’ is not an independent origin or referent by and through which knowledge can be discovered and legitimated; there is no ‘originary naturalness’.<sup>99</sup>

Notwithstanding the cite to Derrida, FEA ‘comes down squarely in favor of the primacy of nature’ with the First Difference and the first conflict functioning as self-evident fact.<sup>100</sup> But, as we have demonstrated through our discussion of sex, gender, and sexuality, ‘there are no entities or events that can legitimately lay claim to being biological and not also’, among others, ‘cultural, or economic, or psychological or historical’.<sup>101</sup> Both compulsory heterosexuality and the ‘First Difference’ logic of the relationship among sex, gender, and violence are theoretically and empirically problematic, but are *required* for FEA’s proposed solution for world peace. In other words, FEA’s solution dictates heterosexual reproduction in heteronormative families, which, as we show in the next section, has a particularly violent history of its own.

### The ‘social’ solution to ‘biological’ difference

Out of the range of security studies evolutionary theorising, only FEA straightforwardly offers a solution to the ‘evolutionary legacy’ of male violence. Yet, both its premise and its solution are unsatisfactory due to a series of theoretical missteps. Analytically, the errors about sex, gender, and sexuality are those outlined above – holding sex as prior to and outside of the power relations, defining gender as essentially keyed to sex, constructing reproductive heterosexual sexuality as both routinised and compulsory, and forwarding an ahistorical universal definition of both sex and gender. These apply both to the premise and the solution but weigh heavily on the argument that male reproductive violence can be socially ‘solved’.

This is because, as undeveloped and unspecified as it is, the ‘First Difference’ forms the pivot of the FEA argument that evolutionarily inspired ‘biological’ male violence in global politics can be solved ‘socially’ rather than being path-dependent. FEA theorists see distinctions in how the ‘First Difference’ may be resolved. If it is solved inequitably ‘corruption and violence’ will result; if solved equitably, peace will result.<sup>102</sup> FEA work argues that handling the First Difference through reconstituted cultural and legal institutions might decrease corruption and violence, and facilitate a more equal, less violent resolution. Consequently, it is this interaction among the first conflict, the first Difference, and the first Other that makes possible ‘the equation of women and states’, whereby ‘the attitudes towards women become templates for attitudes towards states’.<sup>103</sup> In this view, social events and social forces remain ‘proximate causal mechanisms’ while the ‘ultimate’ causal mechanisms are that set of naturally selected anatomical differences.<sup>104</sup>

As such, FEA treats the forces of sexual selection as ahistorical, universal, and unmediated – a ‘disjunctive and biological binarism’ of sex from which gender and sexuality are said to both emerge and coalesce in a heterosexual reproductive rubric.<sup>105</sup> This elides the fundamentally imbricated and socially variable conceptions of sex, gender, and sexuality, each of which are ‘mobilized in a constitutive and productive relation to those other modes of organizing political life’.<sup>106</sup> Moreover, these very same elemental concepts of sex and reproduction are not devoid of politics or context in their original formulations in evolutionary biology. Misreading and

<sup>99</sup>Ibid.

<sup>100</sup>Buss (ed.), *The Handbook of Evolutionary Psychology*, p. 160.

<sup>101</sup>Elizabeth A. Wilson, *Gut Feminism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), p. 28.

<sup>102</sup>Hudson, Bowen, and Nielsen, ‘We are not helpless’.

<sup>103</sup>Hudson, ‘Sex, war, and peace’, p. 34.

<sup>104</sup>Ibid., p. 35; Hudson, ‘The founding template’; Hudson, Bowen, and Nielsen, ‘What is the relationship?’.

<sup>105</sup>Judith Butler, ‘Against proper objects’, *differences*, 6:2/3 (1994), pp. 1–26.

<sup>106</sup>Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 4.

oversimplifying them has not only analytical problems, but also political ones. Politically, FEA's missteps involve a failure to explicate and contextualise evolutionary theorising, which in turn, results in naïve policy positions and the corresponding reduction of gender equality to its functional value for international and domestic security.

As Donna Haraway reminds us, the narrative of evolutionary theory is itself a product of its time and context, developed in functional and capitalist idioms, while the very discourses of survival, worth, and value in relation to individuals and populations and their 'reproductive capital', as Foucault carefully pointed out, effects a particular orientation towards regulation and administration of each – biopolitics – of which eugenics is but one example.<sup>107</sup> FEA's failure to acknowledge such histories is troublesome, especially considering that one of its proponents suggests that when we find genetic markers that 'raise the risk for certain populations to react with higher frequency to environmental assaults with violence, this information can aid in national security policy'.<sup>108</sup> Not only can such genetic markers inform national security policy, but such information might also intimate modes of 'prophylactic treatment' of 'high-risk populations'.<sup>109</sup> In other words, FEA suggests that the state may ostensibly impartially identify, through genetic testing, those individuals deemed to be threats and, in turn, justify targeted interventions and treatments to minimise those risks. Indeed, it was the belief in hereditary predispositions that rationalised the eugenics programmes in the United States – to ensure that those deemed socially deviant (Mexicans, Native Americans, African Americans, disabled) and potentially criminal were unable to reproduce.<sup>110</sup> The vision of 'race betterment', popular in the US in the early twentieth century, continues to silently structure the sorts of claims of prophylactic treatment made by Hatemi and McDermott, while the screening and management of perceived risk of certain population for violence cannot be disentangled from policies of racial incarceration.<sup>111</sup>

Engaging with this history of evolutionary theorising also highlights how the heterosexual reproductive rubric central to FEA is not primordial but is enmeshed in racialised notions of sexuality and sexualised notions of race that construct forms of sexuality and reproduction as perverse or productive, degenerate, or desirable. The language of 'fitness' that governs the rules of sexual selection has been used by states and institutions to control the reproduction of those seen as less 'fit' – often not only in the name of species survival, but also in terms of species ideal refinement.<sup>112</sup>

More specifically, we see in some iterations of FEA these sorts of orderings where the failure to temper the 'evolutionary legacy of male dominance' is associated (incorrectly, even on the terms

<sup>107</sup> Donna Haraway, *Primate Visions* (New York: Routledge, 1989); Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975–76* (New York: Picador, 2003). See also Matthew W. Hughey and W. Carson Byrd, 'Beautiful melodies telling me terrible things', *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 661:1 (2015), pp. 238–58; Solanki, 'The retelling of tales'.

<sup>108</sup> Hatemi and McDermott, 'A neurobiological approach', p. 122.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 121.

<sup>110</sup> Alexandra Minna Stern, *Eugenic Nation Faults and Frontiers of Better Breeding in Modern America* (Berkeley: University of CA Press, 2015).

<sup>111</sup> In this regard, we can only point to the controversy over the 'warrior gene' (McDermott and Hatemi (eds), *Man is by Nature a Political Animal*; Rose McDermott, Dustin Tingley, Jonathan Cowden, Giovanni Frazzetto, and Dominic Johnson, 'Monoamine Oxidase A gene (MAOA) predicts behavioral aggression following provocation', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science*, 106:7 (2009), pp. 2118–23), which was then taken to explain African American men's higher propensity for violence.

<sup>112</sup> See, for example, Patricia Hill Collins, 'It's all in the family: Intersections of gender, race, and nation', *Hypatia*, 13:3 (1998), pp. 62–82 for discussions of gender, Darwinism, and eugenics policies; Spike Peterson's *A Critical Rewriting of the Global Political Economy* discussions of reproductive economies; as well as recent discussions of the gendered and raced elements of the state's regulation of reproduction, for example, Mala Htun and S. Lauren Weldon, *The Logics of Gender Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Weissman, 'Repronormativity'; Lauren B. Wilcox, *Bodies of Violence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).



set out in the work) with Islam.<sup>113</sup> According to some FEA scholarship, evolutionary male violence and dominance can, in part, be undermined through ‘the prohibition of polygyny (and) the elimination of early marriage for girls’.<sup>114</sup> Failure to do so is implied as unique to Islamic states (though it is neither universally true of Islamic states nor limited to those states).<sup>115</sup> This inference, however, undergirds a claim that ‘primitive’ Islamic states, indexed under the term of ‘Islamic Civilization’, have not yet ‘advanced’ to counter this evolutionary legacy in the way progressive, Western states have done so and, instead ‘embrace’ it.<sup>116</sup> Consequently, the tired and disabused colonial trope of Islamic civilisations as backwards and regressive, in need of ‘a good breath of Western logic, education, or liberalism’, is reformulated once again as an argument for gender equality and against violence.<sup>117</sup> Here, we can partially contextualise President Trump’s ‘Muslim Ban’, which states ‘the United States should not admit those who engage in acts of bigotry or hatred ... including “honor” killings, and other forms of violence against women’.<sup>118</sup> Institutionalised as such in a capitalist, imperial, racist, international context, claims about the relationship among sex, gender, and violence cannot be anything but always and already politically situated, reflecting and forwarding a particular vision of political futures.

This lack of engagement with the history of evolutionary theorising is highly problematic as it informs the very logic by which FEA precedes, but so too is its lack of engagement with critical feminist critiques of the state and institutions as instrumentalising attention to gender equality solely in terms of use value. Hudson *et al.* do recognise that the ‘state is a double-edged sword for women’, and ‘unleashing the power of the state in the lives of women can have devastating consequences’.<sup>119</sup> But, they do not integrate this insight into their advocacy for state-based solutions to provide women ‘equal opportunities’. FEA’s critical miscomprehension of how a reliance on the state to ameliorate the ‘evolutionary legacy of male violence’ – made specifically in terms of its own civilisational arguments with its emphasis on the centrality of heterosexual reproduction in heteronormative families – facilitates increased and racialised surveillance, regulation, and legalisation of a highly specific interpretation of sex/gender/sexuality, not only domestically but internationally.<sup>120</sup> Within their formulation, the pursuit of what FEA calls the ‘inestimably valuable policy agenda’ of women’s security as tied to the security of states is not neutral.<sup>121</sup>

Scholars such as Wendy Brown and Angela Davis have clearly outlined how interventions from the state ostensibly in response to ‘unmitigated male violence’ are not only differentially administered according to race, class, and other lines, but also risk codifying what Wendy Brown termed a ‘state of injury’ (or what FEA work repeatedly refers to as wounding) as the only position from which a claim for recognition can be made.<sup>122</sup> As Brown notes, ‘historically, the

<sup>113</sup>Hudson, Bowen, and Nielsen, ‘What is the relationship?’, p. 454.

<sup>114</sup>Hudson, ‘Sex, war, and peace’, p. 36.

<sup>115</sup>Solanki, ‘The retelling of tales’, p. 108.

<sup>116</sup>Hudson, ‘Sex, war, and peace’, p. 36.

<sup>117</sup>Rose McDermott and Jonathan Cowden, ‘Polygyny and violence against women: Paper symposium’, *Emory Law Journal*, 64:6 (2014), pp. 1767–814; Lila Abu-Lughod, ‘Do Muslim women really need saving?’, *American Anthropologist*, 104:3 (2002), pp. 783–90.

<sup>118</sup>Executive Order Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States’ (27 January 2017), available at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/executive-order-protecting-nation-foreign-terrorist-entry-united-states/>.

<sup>119</sup>Hudson *et al.*, *Sex and World Peace*, p. 131.

<sup>120</sup>Ann Towns, *Women and States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

<sup>121</sup>Hudson *et al.*, *Sex and World Peace*, p. 117.

<sup>122</sup>Kathy E. Ferguson, *The Feminist Case against Bureaucracy* (New Orleans, LA: Temple University Press, 1985); Angela Davis, *Abolition Democracy* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2005); Beth Richie, *Arrested Justice* (New York: New York University Press, 2012); Wendy Brown, *States of Injury* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995); Ratna Kapur, ‘Gender, sovereignty and the rise of sexual security regime in international law and postcolonial India’, *Melbourne Journal of International Law*, 14:2 (2013), pp. 317–45.

argument that women require protection by and from men has been critical to legitimating women's exclusion from some spheres and confinement in others', and in regulating the protection of some women to the detriment of others.<sup>123</sup> Kristin Bumiller argues that in the ideological framework of a neoliberal state, feminist analyses of violence are appropriated insofar as they advance the role of 'experts' and 'administration' and, as such, are reliant on 'the language of surveillance, diagnosis and control'.<sup>124</sup> In her contemporary work on the co-optation of domestic violence movement in the service of a racialised carceral state, Beth Richie delimits how 'welfare policy can be used to coerce poor woman of color to a one-size-fits-all heteropatriarchal model of kinship relations'.<sup>125</sup> She further details how 'generalized vulnerability based on gender ... does not incorporate other dimensions of power imbalance', crucially those manifested through race, class, and sexuality, and fails to adequately comprehend the imbricated workings of state and social power manifested through economic exploitation and political disenfranchisement.<sup>126</sup>

Such a one-size-fits-all monological model is the foundation of the argument FEA makes in regard to family law. Hudson *et al.* contend that 'dominance over female by males is at the foundation of historical family law because of our common evolutionary legacy ... in which powerful males made family law in the image of their own reproductive interests'.<sup>127</sup> Therefore, 'for almost all of human history, family law looked very much the same across all cultures'.<sup>128</sup> In this view, reproductive interests continue to function transhistorically and universally – 'unseen and yet determinative, gender relations underpin all macro level phenomena within a society'.<sup>129</sup>

Yet, as Janet Halley demonstrates in her discussion of the evolution of family law, even among traditional European states, there was no template.<sup>130</sup> Rather, as she, Laurel Weldon and Mala Htun note, family law was always reorganised, rearticulated, and redefined over time, influenced heavily by competing conceptions, both subtle and complex, of the meaning of sexuality and reproduction.<sup>131</sup> Htun and Weldon explain that marriage, for example, changed from a contract to a status, while motherhood was first legally conceptualised as deriving from marriage rather than from childbearing. These interpretations and formulations of family law, touching on sex, sexuality, and kinship, cannot be disregarded as simple reflections of a fixed and universal gender inequality grounded in an unchanging reproductive rubric as FEA suggests. For in FEA's formulation not only is gender ahistorical, but history is epiphenomenal. Family law was not (and is not) an effect of fundamental and permanent features of sex, sexuality and kinship, but of the organisation and interpretation of them: 'juridical systems of power produce the subjects they come to represent'.<sup>132</sup> As Halley concludes, there is no such thing as an 'original, essential, mystical, transtemporal and transpatial' family, rooted in heterosexual reproduction.<sup>133</sup> And, when it appears, we should recognise its historicity and delineate its 'ideological investments'.

The recent debate in France over the establishment of pacts of civil solidarity (PACs), a legal form of civil unions between two adults, can bring into focus the complex and precarious effects of calling on the state and family law to identify and correct for inequality, as well as the

<sup>123</sup>Brown, *States of Injury*, p. 170.

<sup>124</sup>Kristin Bumiller, *In an Abusive State* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), p. 13.

<sup>125</sup>Richie, *Arrested Justice*, pp. 3, 20.

<sup>126</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>127</sup>Hudson *et al.*, *Sex and World Peace*, p. 29.

<sup>128</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>129</sup>Hudson *et al.*, 'State fragility', p. 655.

<sup>130</sup>Janet Halley, 'What is family law?', *Yale Journal of Law & the Humanities*, 23:1 (2011), pp. 1–109.

<sup>131</sup>*Ibid.*; Mala Htun and Laurel Weldon, 'Sex Equality in Family Law', Background Paper to the World Development Report (Washington DC: World Bank, 2011), available at: {<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/9204/WDR2012-0006.pdf?sequence=1>}.

<sup>132</sup>Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 2.

<sup>133</sup>Halley, 'What is family law?', pp. 81, 95.

consequences of evolutionary theory in politics. In addressing this highly complicated debate over PACs, which involved interlocking claims for recognition of equal rights by different groups – women, immigrants, and homosexuals – we are following FEA’s suggestive repeated citations of the philosopher Sylviane Agacinski who was intimately involved.<sup>134</sup> This debate circulated around what Camille Robcis terms ‘familialism’, for example, the promotion of normative heterosexual family, in which evolutionary theory, structuralism, and psychoanalysis converged to argue for the privileging of heterosexual reproduction.<sup>135</sup> As Robcis notes, during the debate ‘gender, sexuality, and kinship’ were positioned as if ‘they were the universal trans-historical structures upholding the public’, mirroring the logic of the First Difference.<sup>136</sup> The threat of homosexual reproduction, either through adoption or reproductive technologies, was identified as symbolically, culturally, and institutionally corrupting the state and its institutions because it disrupted what Agacinski calls a ‘natural heterosexuality’.<sup>137</sup> As she argued, ‘a homosexual marriage would make individuals of the same sex parental couples which would call in to question the difference between the sexes and institute the fiction of ‘homosexual fertility’.<sup>138</sup> Further undergirding this claim was that homosexual (or any single sex) parenting undermines the very psycho-social framework that the child requires in order to ‘know’ and understand sexual difference and, therefore, gain an orientation of the world. Consequently, homosexual parenting pathologised the child and, in terms of FEA, puts at risk the possibility of world peace.

Accordingly, recognition of homosexual marriage or reproduction forces the disappearance of what both FEA and Agacinski deem as vital to human organisation and the founding of the state, the interaction of the First Other and the First Difference in heterosexual procreation. And, since according to FEA, it is the child who learns to negotiate the First Difference differently, and thus pave the way to world peace, neither can it risk the potential pathologisation of the child. Likewise, Agacinski dismisses all same sex institutions – be they found in parliaments or in marriage – as incapable of representing or ensuring equality because equality is fundamentally rooted in *sex complementarity* evidenced by the heterosexual couple.<sup>139</sup> So, too, does FEA insist upon sex complementarity; namely, the ‘two halves’ of humanity providing a ‘necessary counterpart’ for each to ‘flourish in a true partnership’ – the hallmark of which is when women’s ‘contributions to the marriage and to the family’ are ‘deeply appreciated’.<sup>140</sup>

By tracing this citation in tandem with FEA’s reliance on the First Difference/First Other and its construction of sex/sexuality, we document how FEA entrenches an inherently conservative and prohibitive formulation of the family, necessarily heterosexual in both form and expression, which muddies equality with sex complementarity, and reaffirms not only the state’s right, but its prerogative, to ensure a specific form of reproduction.<sup>141</sup> Perhaps this is why FEA scholarship finds itself having a significant amount in common with traditionalist interpretations of sex, gender, and heterosexuality, such as those forwarded by the Holy See in the debate about the Rome Statue for the International Criminal Court.<sup>142</sup>

<sup>134</sup>Agacinski’s book from which these authors quote is one that Derrida dismissed for its ‘biologism and conservatism’. See Benoit Peeters, *Derrida: A Biography*, trans. Andrew Brown (Cambridge: Polity, 2012), p. 514. Yet, these authors are repeatedly quoted in FEA scholarship as if their arguments and works were synchronous and in agreement.

<sup>135</sup>Camille Robcis, *The Law of Kinship* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013), p. 13.

<sup>136</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>137</sup>Sylviane Agacinski, *Parity of the Sexes* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), p. 65.

<sup>138</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>139</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>140</sup>Hudson *et al.*, *Sex and World Peace*.

<sup>141</sup>See discussions in fn. 110. See also specific discussions on this point, for example, Crane and Crane-Seeber, ‘What does evolution have to do with legal enclaves?’

<sup>142</sup>Valerie Oosterveld, ‘The definition of gender in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court’, *Harvard Human Rights Journal*, 18:1 (2005), pp. 55–84.

Importantly, it is *this understanding of* role of what FEA calls the ‘good state’, which will be mobilised in their advocacy for the Responsibility to Protect Women (R2PW), and its complementary list of ‘state sponsors of gender terror’. The R2PW is an explicitly ‘feminist hawk’ position, or a ‘Fempolitik’, which would justify the use of force to ‘protect and liberate women from severe oppression’.<sup>143</sup> We will not rehearse in detail the critiques of such invocation of women’s rights and liberties to justify military force and intervention, but suffice to say that we have seen this before. Obviously, actions like the invasion of Afghanistan, ostensibly to protect women, are congruent with this approach and indeed dictate it. Yet, as Helen M. Kinsella and others have argued elsewhere, we should not mistake how the claim to ensure the ‘rights and liberties’ of women obfuscates the fundamentally coercive focus on women as (biopolitical) objects of control for the ultimate goal – namely, control of the territory in/through control of the population. ‘Doubly situating women in the crosshairs, as both subject to and objects of force, and, insidiously, as a “force multiplier” for all sides, knowing and controlling the women becomes the difference between winning or losing.’<sup>144</sup>

Thus, the logic of FEA validates an expansive form of militarism, which explicitly identifies reproduction as a site of state intervention domestically and internationally – promoting a ‘managed sexuality for the health of the state’.<sup>145</sup> Indeed, we already have evidence of these possible effects in international and domestic responses to trafficking, which ‘invariably lapsed into the use of sexual and moral surveillance techniques over women while also betraying a visceral concern over border security’, as part of what Ratna Kapur describes as the ‘sexual security regime’.<sup>146</sup> When combined with FEA’s intense focus on demography, specifically the threat posed by a ‘surplus’ of young, single males, we can see that what is at risk, at the very least, is a perpetual governmentality, a perpetual regulation of sexuality by those ‘powerful states’ who are locked in a ‘zero sum’ game.

Further, beholden to the logic of evolutionary theorising, women are figured and traded as commodities not only in a reproductive economy, but in the economy of international security to be exchanged and bartered, in terms of protection and regulation, and in the service of world peace. For example, in Security Council Resolution 1325, the primacy of peace and security as motivating factors for the adoption of the resolution is clear. Nowhere in Resolution 1325 is the safety and participation of women an end in itself. Resolution 1325 outlines several explicit ways that the inclusion and protection of women furthers the goal of international peace and security, and its ‘sister’ resolutions develop this rationale.<sup>147</sup> Although scholars of these resolutions are rightly mixed in their assessments, there is general agreement that these resolutions are strategic on the part of states insofar as they advance already identified goals, thus the potentially emancipatory power of recognising and addressing women’s unique experiences and contributions during armed conflict, their ‘substantive political content’, are made subservient to bureaucratic and state goals.<sup>148</sup> Inclusion comes at the price of instrumentalisation, and protection comes at the price of participation.

Similarly, Megan MacKenzie’s work on the Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) programmes in postconflict Sierra Leone provides an example of the problems of policy based the assumptions of FEA work.<sup>149</sup> MacKenzie documents that international actors looking

<sup>143</sup>Valerie Hudson and Patricia Leidl, *The Hillary Doctrine* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), p. 178.

<sup>144</sup>Helen M. Kinsella, *The Image before the Weapon* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011); Helen M. Kinsella, ‘Sex as the secret: Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan’, *International Theory* (forthcoming).

<sup>145</sup>Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), pp. 34–5.

<sup>146</sup>Kapur, ‘Gender, sovereignty’, p. 434.

<sup>147</sup>Laura Sjoberg, *Gendering Global Conflict* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013); Carol Cohn, Helen M. Kinsella, and Sheri Gibbins, ‘Women, peace and Security Resolution 1325’, *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 6:1 (2004), pp. 130–40.

<sup>148</sup>Dianne Otto, ‘The exile of inclusion’, *Melbourne Journal of International Law*, 10:1 (2009), pp. 11–26.

<sup>149</sup>MacKenzie, ‘Securitization and desecuritization’.

to reconstruct Sierra Leone recognised the existence of female fighters in the conflict and therefore decided that there should be a DDR programme for female soldiers as well as male soldiers. Despite that progressive recognition, the organisations treated women's violence as anomalous, both for the general population of women and for each individual woman who engaged in political violence. As such, the programmes offered to women who were in the process of disarming emphasised needs traditionally associated with femininity, including but not limited to marriage and reproduction prospects. The best estimates suggest that most of the women who fought in the conflict in Sierra Leone bypassed the DDR process, given both its public nature and that the incentives it provided did not match their needs. This is because, whether it is in Sierra Leone or New York, people do not fall into strict categories of female/feminine and male/masculine, and they do not seek nor occupy traditional sex roles in heterosexual reproduction to the exclusion of other roles, in sex or in life. Those sorts of policies replicate the errors of the assumptions upon which they are based. Consequently, they are ineffective in resolving the challenges for which they were formulated. Rather, such policies evince what Sara Ahmed calls 'sticky attachments'.<sup>150</sup> Namely, 'neo-feminist scholarship performatively injects a sense of normality back into the feminist/gender/IR interruption by reasserting traditional erotic economies and heteronormative arrangements, partly by invoking logics which work through a series of "sticky attachments" to highly emotive gendered narratives'.<sup>151</sup>

Significantly, such sticky attachments also work in equally powerful ways to justify male violence. Recollect, that after the abuses by UN peacekeepers came to public attention in the 1990s, the UN's top official in Cambodia Yasushi Akashi played down the gravity of the allegations, saying, 'Boys will be boys', and it was 'natural' for young men to 'chase young beautiful things of the opposite sex'.<sup>152</sup> Although Hudson *et al.* repetitively state that is not their argument; they do not confront how FEA's argument about the 'evolutionary legacy of male violence' provides a rationale and justification for the naturalness of male violence as the 'ultimate cause'.<sup>153</sup> Politically, what FEA risks is embedding in already regressive institutions, such as the UN, is an essentialism and a ready defence and explanation, indeed a legitimisation, of inaction, for example, 'boys will be boys' or 'evolution made me do it'. This is not a minor concern.

FEA's neglect of these possibilities would simply be faulty academic work if it were not so appealing, both across the academy and to those in the policy world who have started looking for 'feminist' foreign policies that use women to make peacekeepers less likely to commit crimes,<sup>154</sup> that use women's and queer rights as axes of superiority,<sup>155</sup> and that claim to look out for women in the interest of peace and counter-extremism.<sup>156</sup> If women's rights are invoked to counter the 'evolutionary legacy' of male violence, then these rights are inevitably reduced to instruments, such that even inasmuch as the policies are ostensibly made *for* women, they are actually geared to and subsumed by other ends, where women benefiting from them is an ancillary goal, and the primary goal is the improvement of international peace and security (in UN terms) and the reduction of violence (in FEA scholars' terms).

Indeed, this is most recently captured by the phrase 'feminism as counter-terrorism', which is only made legible and legitimate without an analysis of the political context in which it emerged and the policies that it sanctions. As Fionnuala Ní Aoláin argues, 'sporadic references to women'

<sup>150</sup>Sara Ahmed, 'A phenomenology of whiteness', *Feminist Theory*, 8:2 (2007), pp. 149–68.

<sup>151</sup>Marysia Zalewski, 'Do we understand each other yet? Troubling feminist encounters with(in) International Relations', *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 9:2 (2007), pp. 302–12.

<sup>152</sup>Sandra Whitworth, *Men, Militarism, and UN Peacekeeping: A Gendered Analysis* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004), p. 71.

<sup>153</sup>Hudson, Bowen, and Nielsen, 'What is the relationship?'

<sup>154</sup>See discussion in Annica Kronsell, *Gender, Sex and the Postnational Defense: Militarism and Peacekeeping* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>155</sup>See discussion in Manuela Picq and Markus Thiel (eds), *Sexualities in World Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

<sup>156</sup>See Hudson, Bowen, and Nielsen, 'We are not helpless'.



in counterterrorism policies ‘serve important legitimacy and symbolic functions’ for subsequent policies which, in fact, because of ‘the wider legitimacy conferred on the use of multilateral force ... the increased status and deference given to maintaining and extending international security regimes’, result in increased risk and insecurity to women – who, in the discourse of counterterrorism, appear solely as wives and mothers.<sup>157</sup> These are among the perverse results of using instrumentalised and essentialist accounts of gender in security discourses.

## Conclusion

We have disputed and challenged the interpretation and use of evolutionary theory that informs FEA and outlines its negative normative implications and practical effects. The effects include promoting state ‘managed’ heterosexual/heteronormative sexual and familial relations and a dismissal and denigration of alternative forms of sexuality and familial relations. We have argued that FEA’s theoretical foundation is, in fact, a regulation of sexuality not in the service of gender equality, but in service of gender complementarity. To be clear, we are **not** advocating *against* the rights and inclusion of women in global politics. Quite the opposite. We are arguing that the *instrumental and highly specified basis for rights and inclusion* is actually a form of deformation of both, a certain kind of caging and therefore *exclusion*. Further, we showed how FEA’s presumption that sex and gender are universal, homogenous, and descriptive categories rather than heterogeneous and productive ones, combined with its faith in the benevolent paternalism of the state, renders it unable to anticipate, account for, or mediate repressive outcomes or to identify coercion, social control, predation, and repression as fundamental to the state’s promise of protection and recognition, and not as an aberration of it. Power does not merely act upon these categories but produces them.

FEA is unable to account for this, in part, because power in FEA is ultimately grounded in, and returns to, the physical power of males. FEA argues that ‘women accede to male dominance hierarchies because of the one terrible threat which never goes away’.<sup>158</sup> While we certainly note the function of the ‘rape script’ as Sharon Marcus termed it, Joan Scott also helps us to identify how such a construction assumes a ‘consistent or inherent meaning for the human body – outside social or cultural construction – and thus the ahistoricity of sex/gender itself’.<sup>159</sup> According to FEA, women’s rights intervene only insofar as they curb or constrain the evolutionary legacy of male violence, which remains fundamentally unchanged, while women are everywhere constituted the same, as always already potential and passive victims.

To invoke nature in the service of politics is always a risk. We argue that paying attention to FEA shows how a particular interpretation of reproduction becomes ‘not only the genetic original and the first material, but also the sole controlling reference’, such that ‘politics is anything but able to dominate nature ... to its ends, so itself “emerges” informed in such a way that it leaves no space for other constructive possibilities’.<sup>160</sup> First, FEA trivialises (as we discussed earlier) the multiple intersections of race, class, or disability-related oppressions with and related to both gender oppression and gender emancipation. Second, FEA’s presumption of an absolutely homogenous category of women united by the threat of male violence also erases different forms and histories of gender and violence, domestically and internationally. It does so as it explicitly hitches itself to an expansive militarised hegemonic state politics in which ‘national security is the foremost concern, the stakes are zero sum, and the most powerful states are the

<sup>157</sup>Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, ‘The “war on terror” and extremism: Assessing the relevance of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda’, *International Affairs*, 92:2 (2016), pp. 275–91.

<sup>158</sup>Hudson *et al.*, *Sex and World Peace*, p. 75.

<sup>159</sup>Joan W. Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), p. 34.

<sup>160</sup>Roberto Esposito, *Bios: Biopolitics and Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), p. 22.

only ones that matter'.<sup>161</sup> Thus, third, FEA's promotion of a specific form of gender equality (which is more accurately phrased and understood as gender complementarity) as a counter-evolutionary 'social' answer to 'biological' violence trades off with the ability to see other, more radical, and potentially more solvent, adaptations to address the problem of violence – from radical economic change to weapons disarmament. And, finally, if 'women's rights are a fundamental pillar' of this vision of international politics, then women's rights are devoid of any emancipatory or revolutionary potential – they exist in the service of a bellicose state which, contrary to FEA's claim, all but ensures the continuation of violence.<sup>162</sup> Therefore, as we have argued, it is vitally necessary to grasp precisely what is at stake when we frame our responses to violence as response to a 'evolutionary legacy of male violence' because the specific importation and interpretation of evolutionary theorising introduced and defended by FEA and its explicit policy recommendations are precarious and flawed foundations upon which to predicate either peace or equality.

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<sup>161</sup>Valerie M. Hudson and Dara Kay Cohen, 'Women's rights are a national security issue', *New York Times* (26 December 2016), available at: {<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/26/opinion/womens-rights-are-a-national-security-issue.html>}.

<sup>162</sup>*Ibid.*