
Reviewed by Maya Eichler

After US soldier Casey Sheehan was killed in Iraq, his mother became an anti-war activist. In 2005, she set up camp outside of President George W. Bush’s Texas ranch to draw attention to her cause. Cindy Sheehan became the most prominent example of a military family member protesting the war in Iraq. *Fighting for Peace* looks behind the limelight of the media. It offers the first-ever study of the vibrant and diverse US military peace movement that organized in response to the Iraq War. This movement successfully drew attention to the human costs of war at home, advocating for the withdrawal of troops from Iraq and for better veteran care. Military peace activists engaged in protests, walks, public storytelling, street theatre, and public memorials, while offering support and care to fellow veterans and their families.

Sociologist Lisa Leitz, herself a military spouse and member of the military peace movement, draws on seven years of participant observation (2005-2012) and dozens of interviews with activists to provide an in-depth and nuanced study of this social movement located at the intersections of war and peace. She explores the reasons for and the mechanisms by which US veterans and their family members became activists against the war in Iraq. She pays attention both to the internal crafting of a collective movement identity, and to the external appeal and impact of veterans and military family members advocating for peace. The military peace movement, consisting of organizations such as Veterans for Peace, Iraq Veterans Against the War, Gold Star Families for Peace/Gold Star Families Speak Out, and Military Families Speak Out, deliberately drew on their unique insider-outsider positionality and on emotions of grief to draw the public to their cause. As the author argues, identity and emotion were key ingredients in the making and success of this social movement.

The Vietnam War era first saw the emergence of a military peace movement in the United States. However, the end of the draft in 1973, and the widening gap between military and civilian communities, has made it more challenging to mobilize the public against war. The first three chapters of *Fighting for Peace* examine internal movement dynamics: why and how veterans and military family members became activists, built a collective identity, and transformed the negative emotions resulting from the war through activism. Chapter one offers a helpful categorization of “critical military organizations” into (1) service organizations, (2) political action committees, and (3) antiwar organizations, the latter being the subject of the book. The chapter also makes the important point that members of military communities face unique and heightened risks when they turn to activism. As chapter two explains, members of the military peace movement did not see...
their military identity as contradictory to their peace activist identity. On the contrary, they saw their activism as an extension of their service and peace as positive for the military. Through their activism they became outsiders in their military communities, while not always being fully accepted within the peace movement. This led military peace activists to build their own unique identity within the peace movement. As chapter three further argues, this shared sense of identity allowed members of the movement to think of themselves as a family, offering emotional support to one another and allowing various groups to work in concert within a broader “culture of action”. By fostering emotional and familial bonds, Leitz argues, the movement helped members transform “…emotions of powerlessness into emotions of resistance...” (p.129). Hence military peace movement activism can be seen as a form of therapy – highly political but also deeply personal.

Chapters four and five detail the identity strategies and tactics used by members of the military peace movement to draw in the public and change public opinion on the war. Chapter four details how members of the military peace movement strategically used military clothing, symbols, and gestures to signal their military identities while engaging the public. This novel strategy within the peace movement garnered considerable attention from the public and the media. As Leitz argues, military peace activists were able to be heard by appealing to their authority on war and their patriotism, thus challenging the assumed connection between patriotism and support for war. One of the most interesting sections of the book deals with how members of the military peace movement had to navigate conflicting strategic choices between outright pacifism, anti-Iraq war activism, and the potential militarization of the peace movement. Chapter five focuses on one particularly successful tactic of the military peace movement: the art installation of white-cross memorials to commemorate military (and to a lesser extent, civilian) deaths in Iraq. This tactic aimed at reaching the public through the use of grief and, again, by highlighting activists’ military identities and their own personal losses.

The author notes in the conclusion that, while the military peace movement is less active today, it continues to work to end the deployment of troops abroad and improve care programmes for veterans at home. It continues to publicize and raise consciousness of the trauma of war, the unequal costs and burdens of war, and the long-term consequences of war. The US population has mostly been insulated from the effects of war: only 0.5 percent of the population serves in the military and only 5 percent of the population was indirectly affected by the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan as family members of soldiers and veterans (p.234). The military peace movement aimed to narrow this military-civilian divide by highlighting the human costs of war. While it is hard to pinpoint what direct effect the movement had on public opinion, the book convincingly argues that members of the military peace movement succeeded in drawing in the public by appealing to emotions and their unique identity as warriors turned peace activists.

The author locates the book primarily within social movement scholarship, pushing scholars to take seriously the role of identity and emotion in creating possibilities and limitations for social movement activists. While the author is firmly rooted within the
discipline of sociology, the book will be of interest to a wider range of researchers who identify with other scholarly fields such as critical military studies, peace studies, International Relations/critical security studies, and feminist scholarship on women’s and men’s peace movements. That being said, an inclusion of a wider multidisciplinary set of relevant literature and cases would have enriched the book. In particular, feminist scholarship on militarization such as Cynthia Enloe’s 2000 book *Maneuvres* might have proven useful in understanding the continued appeal as well as inherent limitations of leveraging (gendered) military identities to build support for peace, which the military peace movement so evocatively did. Existing scholarship on antimilitarism and peace activism might also have helped better contextualize the uniqueness of the military peace movement for the reader. Finally, a more global perspective could have allowed the author to put the US case into context. While this book presents a one-country case study (and that in itself is a worthwhile task), references to anti-war groups founded by veterans or military family members in countries such as Russia (Union of the Committees of Soldiers’ Mothers of Russia), Israel (Breaking The Silence), or the UK (Veterans for Peace UK) could have helped demonstrate the broader global significance of this type of social movement. In future work, building on Leitz’s important contribution, it would be interesting to explore similarities and differences between the US military peace and military peace movements in other countries.

Military peace movements defy easy categorization. Straddling peace activist and military communities, they defy a simplistic dichotomous view of war and peace which often informs public imagination as well as academic discourse. However, as this book shows, military peace activists also reproduce the dichotomy by invoking first-hand military experience, military symbols, or pacifism as the extension of military service. This speaks to the larger question of how our activism and scholarship can truly overcome the war-peace dichotomy as well as challenge militarization. *Fighting for Peace* offers an excellent opportunity to explore this question even if it does not fully answer it. Importantly, the book clearly shows that the scholarly rift between military studies and peace studies is problematic. Those interested in military, security, and defense issues need to be more curious about peace and peace activism, while those who study peace and peace activism need to take seriously the experiences of veterans and their families.

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