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Chapter 29

From gendered war to gendered peace? Feminist perspectives on international intervention in sites of conflict

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Introduction

Feminist Peace and Conflict Studies (PCS) is a research paradigm that develops and applies feminist theories and methodologies to provoke fresh insights into armed conflict and contemporary peacebuilding. Feminist research offers alternative theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches to the positivist research that dominates mainstream PCS. Feminist analyses promote emancipatory forms of peace by critiquing the dominant institutions, ideational frameworks, and prevailing practices of contemporary peacebuilding (e.g. True et al. 2017). These studies highlight that international statebuilding often serves the interests of the most powerful actors and institutions in international politics (Pratt 2013). Feminist researchers often deploy 'bottom-up' methodologies to excavate and analyse situated experiences of peace and conflict (e.g. Väyrynen 2019).

Significantly, feminist research is exemplified by a firm commitment to confront the entrenched androcentrism (or gender bias) of PCS research. Feminist scholars challenge the tendency of both mainstream and critical PCS scholars to overlook gender – and the perspectives of women, girls, and non-binary people – in their analyses of armed conflict and of peace processes (McLeod and O'Reilly 2019, p.128). They argue that a gender analysis is crucial, firstly, for understanding the root causes and consequences of armed conflict, and, secondly, for developing adequate theories and practices of building peace (e.g. El-Bushra 2018). Feminist researchers therefore place gender – understood as a social construct, a power structure, or alternatively as performative (Butler 1999) – at the centre of conflict and peacebuilding analyses. They highlight that gender roles and identities, and norms relating to masculinity and

femininity, are forged, maintained, yet frequently challenged in conflict and peacebuilding processes (O'Reilly 2013).[1]

The aim of this chapter is to highlight the key contributions and challenges offered by feminist approaches to PCS. It provides a (necessarily brief) overview of the field of feminist PCS, and spotlights gender as a power-laden social construction that must be unpacked to understand the key drivers of conflict and post-war recovery processes. The chapter begins with an introduction to feminist theory, and briefly considers how feminist PCS scholarship reflects and expands upon various strands of feminist theorising. Next, I move on to explore the gendered logic and impact of violent conflict. I examine how war reinforces, yet also frequently destabilises, traditional gender norms, relations, and power structures. Unfortunately, opportunities to challenge gendered inequalities in the transition from war to peace are frequently lost. Instead, gendered forms of violence, domination, injustice, and inequality often (re-)emerge in 'peacetime'. To understand why this occurs, the next section explores feminist analyses of post-conflict peacebuilding, with a focus on the UN's expanding Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda. I note a significant gap between international rhetoric on gender justice and equality, and the reality of implementation in sites of intervention. Peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction initiatives frequently work to re-inscribe rather than contest hierarchical gender roles, identities and structures of power, meaning that gender injustice and insecurity often become (re)entrenched.

Feminist theories: An overview

Feminist theories are multidisciplinary, and span many ontological, epistemological, and methodological perspectives. Feminist theories have been variously labelled as liberal, Marxist, socialist, radical, standpoint, postcolonial and postmodern. Liberal

[1] Following Harding (1986, pp. 17–18), I understand gendered social life to emerge from processes of *gender symbolism* ('assigning dualistic gender metaphors to perceived dichotomies', such as war and peace), *gender structure* ('appealing to these gender dualisms to organize social activity'), and their resulting impact on individual *gender identity*.

feminism is grounded in an individualistic paradigm of rights, equality, autonomy and rationality, and is built upon the presumption of *sameness* between men and women (Beasley 1999, p. 52). Liberal feminists focus on achieving formal *equality* between women and men (e.g. within education, the workplace, political institutions), through legal and institutional reform (Squires 1999, p. 55). Marxist and socialist feminists contend that gender inequality derives from unequal *social-economic structures*. They have examined the *systematic* oppression and exploitation of women as a product of a capitalism, arguing that capitalist systems maintain gendered divisions of labour in private (unpaid work in the household) and public spheres (paid work in the workplace) (Jackson 2001, p. 284). Radical feminists argue that women's *shared* oppression is rooted in patriarchal power structures which enable and legitimate the domination of women by men (MacKinnon 1989). Instead of gender equality, radical feminists emphasise gender *difference* and work to reclaim many of the virtues and values associated with femininity (e.g. caring) as a basis from which to (re)build gender-just societies (Alcoff 1988, pp. 408–15).

Feminist scholarship and activism on issues of peace and conflict reflects and extends many of these modernist strands of feminist theorising. For example, recent research supports liberal feminism's demand for women's equal representation in formal peace processes, by demonstrating that women's direct participation in peace negotiations increases the sustainability and quality of peace achieved (Krause et al. 2018). Furthermore, feminist political economy research has illuminated key structures of economic inequality which generate gendered forms of violence and insecurity (Chilmeran and True, Chapter 31 in this volume). Feminist standpoint studies, meanwhile, have documented the everyday dimensions of violent conflict and of peacebuilding processes, by building analyses from the embodied experiences of situated women (Cockburn 2004; Enloe 2014). By foregrounding the relationship between gender and militarism, patriarchy and armed conflict (Reardon 1985; Enloe 2000), these studies have built a more accurate and more complete account of the social processes and structures that produce and sustain violence and insecurity.

The notion that women constitute a homogeneous category was convincingly challenged by 'black', 'Third World', queer, working-class, and/or non-binary feminist

scholars and activists (e.g. Anzaldúa 1987; hooks 1984). These feminists highlight the importance of *intersectionality* (Crenshaw 1989) – of exploring the intricate connections between gender and other structures of hierarchy/oppression, such as nationalism, racism, heteronormativity, and colonialism. Postcolonial feminists have questioned western feminism's tendency to emphasise difference (Jaggar 2005, p. 187; Narayan 1998). Dominant practices of knowing, interpreting, and speaking about gendered and racialised 'others', they argue, perpetuate neo-colonial forms of domination and divest postcolonial subjects of subjectivity and agency (Spivak 1988, p. 272). Poststructuralist feminists, moreover, deconstruct the totalising 'metanarratives' that claim to explain women's subordination across time and space (Butler 1999). They highlight the importance of exploring how 'woman' as subject is constructed within historically and socially situated discourses, enabling certain subject positions to be taken up whilst excluding possible alternatives (Weedon 1997). This points to the importance of honouring the diversity of voices and perspectives that exists among women and within feminism.

Feminist analyses of peace and conflict have responded to these important debates and interventions. Feminist PCS scholarship has, for example, outlined the strong connections between gender and nationalism. These studies have exposed the nation and the state as highly gendered social constructions and spotlighted the various modes by which women and men differently participate in ethnic, national, and statebuilding processes (Yuval-Davis and Anthias 1989). The relationship between nationalist agendas and feminist goals of gender equality is revealed as highly ambivalent (Kaplan 1997, p. 3). Nationalist armed struggles rely on women's labour, yet they frequently discount women's contributions once arms are laid down to rest (Yuval-Davis and Anthias 1989; Enloe 2000). Yet, in some instances armed conflict may represent a 'potential springboard for women's emancipation' (Sharoni 2001, p. 87). Feminist goals are therefore not necessarily incompatible with those of anti-colonial and nationalist movements, particularly in circumstances where women's emancipation is explicitly included on nationalist agendas (Jayawardena 1998; Kandiyoti 1991; Moghadam 1994).

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Gender and war

War-fighting and peacebuilding are profoundly gendered activities. War is associated both historically and currently with men and masculinity, whilst peace is long connected with women and femininity (Cooke 1996). Traditional narratives of war (re)produce stereotypical images of male fighters and women non-combatants as 'Just Warriors' and 'Beautiful Souls' (Elshtain 1995). With masculinity associated with a life-taking identity, and femininity connected to life-giving and life-preserving (Åhäll 2012), there is often a reluctance to recognise the significant contributions that women make to the war effort, particularly their combatant roles.

In response, feminist scholars have worked to identify and challenge many of the gender biases, exclusions and stereotypes associated with women and issues of war and peace (e.g. Cockburn 2007). This includes, for example, exposing how women and men are (differently) mobilised in wartime by states and armed resistance movements. Although women are largely invisible in historical and contemporary accounts of war, feminist scholars point out that armed groups depend upon women's labour (Enloe 2000, 2014), disrupting assumptions of women's innate peacefulness. Women have actively engaged as agents of violence – as perpetrators of suicide bombings and other terrorist acts (Hunt and Rygiel 2006), as fighters within anti-colonial and national liberation movements (Moghadam 1994), and as combatants within ethno-nationalist conflicts (Alison 2009). Feminist studies tell a 'different kind of war story' (Nordstrom 1997). By revealing the myriad (and at times empowering) roles that women take up, feminist scholars contest the traditional meta-narrative of war, disrupting its assumptions and revealing it as profoundly gendered (Cooke 1996).

Feminist interrogations of armed conflict note that gendered norms and narratives are frequently mobilised to rationalise and legitimise political violence (Shepherd 2008). The gendered logic of war means that men and boys frequently face gender-specific risks in wartime such as imprisonment and forcible recruitment as combatants, whilst women and girls are often disproportionally affected by sexual- and gender-based violence such as forced marriage and sexual slavery (Brammertz and Jarvis 2016). Individuals who do not identify with binary categories of 'women' and

'men', 'girls' and 'boys', and those who do conform to dominant heterosexual norms, often experience increased violence and insecurity (Myrttinen and Daigle 2017).

Undoubtedly, armed conflicts produce 'destructive synergies of loss and suffering' for individuals and communities who are affected by violence and insecurity (Walker 2009, p. 20). Yet, feminist analyses also highlight that periods of violent conflict frequently destabilise gender identities and power relations (Valji 2007, p. 6). 'War,' as Turshen (1998, p. 20) writes, '…destroys the patriarchal structures of society that confine and degrade women. In the very breakdown of traditions, customs, and community, war also opens up new beginnings.' Consequently, the aftermath of war is often viewed as providing a crucial 'window of opportunity' (Valji 2010) in which to challenge gender inequalities. Nevertheless, once a conflict officially ends and peace is formally re-established, feminist warn that 'the pendulum of society swings from wartime to peacetime norms, [and] the window for women can close' (Anderlini 2007, p. 146). Women are often expected to place their hopes and demands for positive transformation on the 'backburner' after wars end (Enloe 2004, p. 215). This highlights the importance of examining whether transitional moments represent 'a critical moment in the shifting terrain of gender power' (Meintjes 2001, p. 64), or alternatively constitute a 'moment of retrenchment' due to the reinforcement of traditional gender norms (Ní Aoláin and Hamilton 2009, p. 381). This includes understanding whether international peacebuilding interventions in (post-)conflict settings work to empower women and enhance their social standing, or alternatively contribute to their marginalisation and disempowerment.

Gender and peace

The UN Agenda on "Women, Peace and Security"

The adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (hereafter UNSCR 1325) on WPS in October 2000 created hope that internationally supported peacebuilding and reconstruction interventions in contexts of conflict could contribute to the (re)building of gender-just forms of peace. This resolution is often viewed as a breakthrough in the advancement of women's rights and marked the first occasion that the UN Security Council specifically placed issues of gender justice and equality on its peace and

security agenda (Cohn 2008). UNSCR 1325 and subsequent WPS resolutions[2] outline four priority areas for addressing the gendered impacts of armed conflict and for ensuring that women fully and equally participate in all aspects of peacebuilding. These four 'pillars' emphasise the importance of: increasing the *participation* of women as leaders in decision-making on peace and security matters; ensuring the *protection* of women's rights; adopting measures that focus on the *prevention* of violence; and promoting the *relief and recovery* of survivors of wartime violence, particularly survivors of sexual- and gender-based violence in war (George and Shepherd 2016).

Undoubtedly, the WPS agenda has provoked numerous changes in the policies and practices of key actors involved in international peacebuilding initiatives. Several regional organisations, including the African Union, the European Union, NATO, and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, have committed themselves to UNSCR 1325-related goals and activities (Barnes 2011, pp. 23–4). Furthermore, by 2018, 76 UN member states had adopted National Action Plans for the Implementation of UNSCR 1325,[3] albeit with significant variations in implementation, financing, monitoring, and evaluation (Coomaraswamy 2015, pp. 246–8). UNSCR 1325 has also been embraced as a useful advocacy tool, enabling civil society activists to demand that women's diverse roles in conflict and peacebuilding be recognised and that women be included in all processes that affect their lives (Anderlini 2007; Basu 2016; McLeod 2015a).

However, the subsequent record of UNSCR 1325 indicates serious gaps and persistent obstacles which hamper the meaningful realisation of the WPS policy agenda. For example, nearly two decades after the adoption of UNSCR 1325, formal peace negotiations continue to be dominated almost exclusively by men (UN Women 2012, p.

[2] At the time of writing, nine WPS resolutions had been adopted: UNSCR 1325 (2000), 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009), 1889 (2009), 1960 (2010), 2106 (2013), 2122 (2013), 2242 (2015) and 2467 (2019).

[3] Figures obtained from PeaceWomen website, a project of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom which monitors implementation of UNSCR 1325 https://www.peacewomen.org/member-states (accessed 8 October 2018).

3). This is despite evidence that the substantive inclusion of women in peace processes exerts a positive impact on the quality and durability of the peace that is produced (Paffenholz et al. 2016). In addition, rape and other forms of sexual violence continue to be perpetrated frequently by both state and non-state armed groups (Nordäs and Nagel 2018). This is despite the existence of increased monitoring and reporting structures. These gendered acts of political violence – which represent serious violations of human rights - continue to be deliberately perpetrated against women and girls, men and boys, and individuals with diverse sexual and gender identities in contexts of violent conflict (Davies and True 2015). Furthermore, women in (post-)conflict settings frequently experience gendered forms of discrimination – preventing many from fully participating in key political and economic institutions, justice processes, and security institutions, etc., on equal terms as men (Coomaraswamy 2015). Dominant models of post-conflict peacebuilding and reconstruction appear to be (re)embedding rather than effectively contesting patriarchal discourses and practices in countries recovering from violent conflict.

The liberal peace: Critical perspectives

In recent years, international peacebuilding interventions in contexts of conflict have sought to create durable peace by undertaking a wide variety of 'statebuilding' activities designed to liberalise the political, economic, and social institutions of post-conflict states (Mac Ginty and Richmond 2007, p. 491). Through ceasefire monitoring, Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration (DDR) programmes, good governance initiatives, and marketisation and economic restructuring programmes among other activities, international peace operations focus on (re)constructing a 'liberal peace' by transforming previously 'war-shattered states' into 'liberal-market economies' (Paris 2004).

The mixed and often disappointing record of international statebuilding interventions – in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mozambique, Timor Leste, and other settings – has sparked ongoing debates concerning the benevolence, efficacy, and legitimacy of the liberal peace project. Critical PCS scholars have interrogated the normative foundations and legitimacy of liberal peacebuilding – by asking questions

such as *why* and *how* is peace being built? *which* vision of peace is being constructed? and *whose* interests are served by post-conflict reconstruction? (Tadjbakhsh 2010, p. 126). Contemporary peacebuilding is critiqued as 'essentially a colonial undertaking' (Darby 2009, p. 709) that remains trapped in colonialist structures of thought and patterns of action (Darby 2009, p. 701). Others add that peacebuilding is marked by cultural insensitivity (Mac Ginty 2011), technocratic rationality (Väyrynen 2004), and an unwillingness to engage with everyday needs (Kappler and Richmond 2011).

The realisation that liberal approaches may be part of the *problem* rather than the *solution* to contemporary conflict has provoked calls to 'think anew about peace operations' (Bellamy and Williams 2004). Consequently, critical scholars have recently deployed concepts such as hybridity (Richmond and Mitchell 2012), agency (Kappler 2014), the everyday (Mac Ginty 2014), and peace formation (Richmond 2014), to explore how peace emerges through bottom-up (rather than solely top-down) initiatives, and by informal and endogenous as well as formal and exogenous actors and institutions.

Beyond the liberal peace: Feminist contributions and challenges

Whilst critical PCS researchers have provoked crucial debates about the liberal peace project, they often overlook the significance of women, gender, and feminist perspectives in their analyses of post-conflict reconstruction (McLeod and O'Reilly 2019). Feminist studies point out that women often experience new forms of prejudice and discrimination in the aftermath of armed conflict (Žarkov and Cockburn 2002). Indeed, women in 'post-conflict' contexts, often encounter a 'continuum of violence' (Cockburn 2004) across war and peace. Sexual and gender-based violence in conflict is frequently not addressed in peace negotiations, leading to impunity (Jenkins and Goetz 2010) and a failure to provide survivors with protection, justice, and redress (Davies et al. 2016). Post-conflict peacebuilding and recovery mechanisms frequently work to (re-)entrench a 'patriarchal gender order' (Deiana 2018, p. 200) through the implementation of power-sharing mechanisms (Byrne and McCulloch 2012), DDR programmes (Wilén, Chapter 30 in this volume), transitional justice mechanisms (Mibenge 2013), microfinance (Stavrevska 2018) and other initiatives. By failing to address the gendered

structures of inequality that emerge before, during, and after war, the liberal peace often neglects the interests and needs of survivors of wartime violence and fails to build sustainable peace (O'Reilly 2018). This points to the importance of integrating a gender perspective into critical PCS scholarship.

Feminist concepts – such as care (Ruddick 1990) and 'empathetic cooperation' (Sylvester 1994) – and methods including narrative analysis (Björkdahl and Selimovic 2018) and institutional ethnography (Smith 2005) – have pushed forward critical debates within PCS (McLeod and O'Reilly 2019: pp.137-8). Furthermore, feminist researchers have over several decades provided rich, situated accounts of how peace is built in everyday spaces (Boulding 2000). Despite these insights, feminist scholars and activists are routinely ignored by critical debates on the so-called 'local turn' in peacebuilding and explorations of everyday peace (Vaittinen et al. 2019). This is disappointing, as feminist PCS scholarship significantly contributes to, and complicates, critical debates.

Feminist studies, for example, cast a spotlight onto the embodied, affective, and 'personal-political' experiences of war and post-war reconstruction interventions (McLeod 2015b, p. 54; Partis-Jennings 2017; Väyrynen 2019). They offer vital insights into gendered experiences of war and peacebuilding; and reveal the apparently mundane strategies and tactics that individuals use to survive and at times to resist militarism and violence (Manchanda 2017; O'Gorman, 2011).

Feminist analyses also highlight the tendency of 'hybridised' peacebuilding approaches to sustain gendered forms of violence, insecurity, and inequality (George 2017; M'Cormack-Hale 2018; Oosterom 2017). The failure to promote gender equality as an integral aspect of peacebuilding, they argue, reinforces power hierarchies and conflict dynamics, and leads to justice and security sector institutions being unresponsive to local needs (Gordon et al. 2015). Feminist studies of the power relations that operate within peacebuilding initiatives 'open the way for a richer analysis of power' and enable researchers to uncover 'hidden or mundane practices and processes' that significantly shape such interventions (McLeod 2015b, p. 52). The gendered power dynamics of hybrid peacebuilding interactions are essential for

understanding how and why certain actors and issues (such as gender-based violence) are privileged whilst others are marginalised (Ryan and Basini 2017).

Feminist analyses also provide a rich understanding of the gendered forms of agency that emerge in contexts of conflict and peacebuilding (Björkdahl and Selimovic 2015; Henrizi 2015; O'Reilly 2018; Yadav 2016). Far from being passive victims of conflict, women frequently exercise creative, transformative, and/or critical forms of agency (Björkdahl and Selimovic 2015). Peacebuilding interventions may open up, or alternatively close down, opportunities for agency and resistance to be (re-)asserted in the push for gender justice and social transformation.

If PCS research wishes to engage with processes of peace formation which provide 'a contextual, critical, and emancipatory epistemology of peace' (Richmond and Pogodda 2016, p. 2), then it must strengthen collaborations with feminist scholars and activists located in sites of conflict. Grasping a better understanding of the gender dynamics of conflict, and the everyday activities that are deployed to challenge gendered forms of violence and inequality, are essential for building positive forms of peace.

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