I. Gender, peace and armed conflict

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Introduction

The gendered nature of war has been a consistent pattern throughout modern history. War is gendered in terms of who participates, as well as who it affects and how. Gender is also relevant to the causes and consequences of armed conflict. A key research finding is that societies that tend to have more gender equality are more peaceful than less gender-equal societies.

Nonetheless, despite these important research findings, research on security and conflict pays little attention to gender, or the 'socially constructed roles, behaviors, activities, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women', and how gender relations influence war and peace.[2] This is also true of the scholarly community writing in the SIPRI yearbook—only one chapter focused on gender has been published in the SIPRI yearbook in the past 15 years, while the other chapters rarely refer to gender, feminism or other related terms that might indicate engagement with gender issues.[3] This is not unusual: mainstream research on security and conflict routinely ignores gender as a relevant issue. Despite the growing evidence of gender's importance, studies that emphasize a gender perspective on matters of peace and conflict are almost exclusively cited by scholars who are primarily studying gender, and the findings are, by and large, not reflected in mainstream contributions to the field. This state of affairs is highly problematic. The following section briefly discusses the large number of studies that show how gender is of central importance to understanding security and conflict.

Using a gender perspective to analyse armed conflict means taking account of both the biological sex of participants and victims, and the social roles and expectations that are differentially attributed to men and women and that permeate relationships and societies. This review focuses on two themes. First, it discusses the gendered nature of participation and suffering in violence and war. The most striking pattern with regard to participation in violence, including war, is that the overwhelming majority of the

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[2] World Health Organization, 'What do we mean by "sex" and "gender"?', Gender, women and health, <http://www.who.int/gender/whatisgender/en/>.

[3] Bastick, M., 'Integrating Gender in Post-conflict Security Sector Reform', *SIPRI Yearbook 2008*, pp. 149–171. See also chapter 8, section III, in this volume.

participants are men. This is not typically problematized in the mainstream literature on security and conflict. At the same time, the strongly gendered patterns of participation and suffering defy simplistic stereotypes that assign all men to the category of combatants and all women and children to the role of victim.

The second theme is the relationship between gender equality and peace. In the past decade, a number of studies have shown that more gender-equal societies are more peaceful. No studies have been published to disprove this association. Nonetheless, most mainstream research on the causes of war and peace continue to ignore the possible explanatory value of gender relations.

This compartmentalization and neglect of the research on the role of gender in security and conflict are not only intellectually dubious but also damaging for the practice of promoting peace and security. Evidence-based practice must take the gendered nature of war and peace into account.

The gendered nature of participation in violence and suffering

As far as is known, the overwhelming majority of the people who have ever fought in wars throughout history have been men. This pattern still holds, despite the increasing number of women combatants in recent history. According to Goldstein, less than 1 per cent of all warriors in history have been women.[4] The most extensive study so far of women's participation as combatants in contemporary armed conflict studied 72 rebel groups active between 1990 and 2008. It showed that the active combatants were all male in more than two-thirds of the groups.[5] In analyses of war this striking male predominance is often treated as something natural and in need of no combatant, and is, therefore, systematically overlooked. Inherent biological differences however cannot explain this extreme overrepresentation of men, and the social structures that cause violence to be such a male-dominated activity require further investigation.[6] It is important to point out the obvious: most men are not violent. Hence, why the minority that does take to arms is predominantly male is a question that needs to be posed.

The general tendency for combatants to be almost all men is not negated by the fact that women can be highly capable fighters, or that many women have played combat roles in various armed forces and rebel groups. The strong norm of the male combatant means that the active participation of women in rebel movements is often underestimated. This is partly because

[4] Goldstein, J., *War and Gender: How Gender Shapes the War System and Vice Versa* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2001), p. 10.

[5] Henshaw, A. L., 'Why women rebel: understanding female participation in intrastate conflict', Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Arizona, 2013, <http://arizona.openrepository.com/arizona/bitstream/10150/293429/1/azu_etd_12667_sip1_m.pdf>.

[6] Goldstein (note 4).

women tend to participate in capacities other than as active combatants, such as cooks, spies or messengers, and such capacities are usually not taken into account.[7]

It is also the case that violence has differential impacts on men and women. While estimating death tolls during armed conflict is notoriously challenging, it is particularly difficult to obtain sex-disaggregated data. Large databases of wartime casualties, such as the Uppsala Conflict Data Programme, rely primarily on reports from news media and global NGOs, which do not usually provide such information.[8] It is, however, possible to discern a drastic overrepresentation of men among the violent war deaths in 13 countries between 1955 and 2002 from a large survey based on sibling accounts.[9] It would be easy to attribute this overrepresentation solely to differences in battle exposure between men and women, but this could be misleading. Studies of civilian victimization during the 1992–95 war in Bosnia and Herzegovina show that civilian men were at more than three times greater risk of being killed by armed forces than civilian women.[10] This stands in stark contrast to the United Nations-led humanitarian evacuations of Bosnian women, children and the elderly as 'the most vulnerable' to wartime violence.[11]

Vulnerability, however, is not captured by direct war deaths alone. Although not systematically proven, it is generally agreed that women are subjected more often than men to certain forms of wartime violence such as sexual exploitation.[12] Additional insights can be derived from data collected for a study by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), in which gender-disaggregated incidences of election-related violence were mapped in six countries (Bangladesh, Burundi, Guinea, Guyana, Nepal and Timor-Leste) between 2006 and 2010. The study showed that while men most commonly experienced physical harm, the most common form of election-related violence experienced by women was psychological violence and intimidation. The difference was striking: the proportional frequency of intimidation against women was almost three times greater

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[7] Henshaw (note 5).

[8] Uppsala Conflict Data Program, UCDP Conflict Encyclopaedia, Uppsala University, <http://www.ucdp.uu.se/database>.

[9] Obermeyer, Z., Murray, C. J. L. and Gakidou, E., 'Fifty years of violent war deaths from Vietnam to Bosnia: analysis of data from the world health survey programme', *British Medical Journal*, 26 June 2008, pp. 1482–86.

[10] Zwierzchowski, J. and Tabeau, E., 'The 1992–95 war in Bosnia and Herzegovina: census-based multiple system estimation of casualties' undercount', Conference Paper for the International Research Workshop on the Global Costs of Conflict, 1–2 Feb. 2010, <http://www.icty.org/x/file/About/OTP/War_Demographics/en/bih_casualty_undercount_conf_paper_100201.pdf>.

[11] Carpenter, C. R., *Innocent Women and Children: Gender, Norms and the Protection of Civilians* (Ashgate: Burlington, VT, 2006).

[12] See, e.g. Human Security Report Project, *Human Security Report 2005: War and Peace in the 21st Century* (Simon Fraser University: Burnaby, 2005).

than for men, while the proportional frequency of physical violence was three times greater among men than women. The study also revealed that electoral violence is often sexual and economic in nature. Defining violence in the traditionally narrow sense as inflicting physical harm therefore misses other forms of vulnerabilities.[13]

Similar insights can found by looking at the effects of war over time. While adult men constitute the majority of victims in direct conflict-related violence, women and children suffer substantially from the long-term consequences of war such as deteriorating health infrastructure and food shortages.[14]

Psychological research suggests that levels of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression may vary with the *type* of trauma exposure.[15] The types of trauma that women are primarily exposed to in war, such as sexual violence or witnessing the death of family members, may be associated with a higher risk of psychological ill-health, which in turn could explain why women report higher levels of psychological ill-health after war.[16] Moreover, experiences of sexual violence often lead to severe physical, psychological and social difficulties after the war. Sexual violence is associated with deep feelings of shame, guilt and stigma that affect victims long after the war is over.[17]

While gender research has put conflict-related sexual violence on the agenda, it has perhaps also, involuntarily, contributed to a stereotypical view of conflict-related sexual violence as something that primarily affects women. Research has tended to overlook men as victims of conflict-related sexual violence.[18] In an in-depth investigation of the reports by the Peru-

[13] Bardall, G., *Breaking the Mold: Understanding Gender and Election Violence* (IFES White Paper Series: Washington DC, December 2011).

[14] On conflict-related violence against adult men, see Brunborg, H., Lyngstad, T. H. and Urdal, H., 'Accounting for genocide: how many were killed in Srebrenica?', *European Journal of Population*, vol. 19, no. 3 (Jan. 2003), pp. 229–248; and Verwimp, P., 'Machetes and firearms: The organization of massacres in Rwanda', *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 43, no. 1 (Jan. 2006), pp. 5–22. On the longer-term consequences of war, see Ghobarah, H. A., Huth, P. and Russett, B., 'The post-war public health effects of civil conflict', *Social Science & Medicine*, vol. 59, no. 4 (Aug. 2004), pp. 869–84; and Plümper, T. and Neumayer, E., 'The unequal burden of war: the effect of armed conflict on the gender gap in life expectancy', *International Organization,* vol. 60, no. 3 (Feb. 2006), pp. 723–54.

[15] Pham, P. N., Weinstein, H. M. and Longman, T., 'Trauma and PTSD symptoms in Rwanda: Implications for attitudes toward Justice and Reconciliation', *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)*, vol. 292, no. 5 (Aug. 2004), pp. 602–12; and Vinck, P., Pham, P. N., Stover, E. and Weinstein, H. M., 'Exposure to war crimes and implications for peace building in northern Uganda', *JAMA*, vol. 298, no. 5 (Aug. 2007), pp. 543–54.

[16] Brounéus, K., 'The trauma of truth telling: effects of witnessing in the Rwandan Gacaca courts on psychological health', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, vol. 54, no. 3 (June 2010), pp. 408–37.

[17] See e.g. Herman, J. L., *Trauma and Recovery* (Basic Books: New York, 1997); and Brounéus, K., 'Truth telling as talking cure? Insecurity and retraumatization in the Rwandan Gacaca courts', *Security Dialogue*, vol. 39, no. 1 (Feb. 2008), pp. 55–76.

[18] Sivakumaran, S., 'Sexual violence against men in armed conflict', *European Journal of International Law*, vol. 18, no. 2 (Apr. 2007), pp. 253–76; and Solangon, S. and Patel, P., 'Sexual violence against men in countries affected by armed conflict', *Conflict, Security & Development*, vol. 12, no. 4 (Sep. 2012), pp. 417–42.

vian and El Salvadorian Truth Commissions, Leiby finds that the systematic sexual torture of men was not categorized as such, but only as generic torture.[19] Official statistics indicated that male victims of sexual violence constituted just 1 per cent of the victims of sexual violence in Peru and 2 per cent in El Salvador, but these figures were revised to 22 and 53 per cent, respectively, following Leiby's reassessment. Another misconception is that rape is an unavoidable by-product of war. The fact is, however, that not all armed groups commit wartime rape, and the extent of sexual violence varies by conflict. This variation requires further investigation. Cohen and Nordås collected data on the prevalence of sexual violence in 129 active conflicts involving 625 armed actors in the period 1989–2009 in their Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict (SVAC) dataset.[20] They found no reports of this type of violence in 43 per cent of the conflicts.[21] Muvumba Sellström's data on incidents of sexual violence among 23 armed actors in sub-Saharan Africa in 1989–2011 provides additional insights. Eight of these 23 actors were reported as responsible for 68 per cent of the abuses and assaults.[22]

While there is a clear need for more and better sex-disaggregated data, the above review highlights crucial ways in which participation and suffering in armed conflict are gendered. The section below presents findings on the consequences of gender inequality.

Gender equality and peace

Gender is also relevant for gaining an understanding of the causes of armed conflict and of peace. Gender equality matters for peace at the individual, organizational and state levels.

Public opinion studies in the United States have established a difference in the attitudes of men and women towards the use of force, with men being more likely than women to advocate or support violent solutions.[23] These differences have been linked to state behaviour once women gain access to political office and are able to influence state policy.[24] The

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[19] Leiby, M., 'The promise and peril of primary documents: documenting wartime sexual violence in El Salvador and Peru', eds. M. Bergsmo, A. Butenschøn Skre and E. J. Wood, *Understanding and Proving International Sex Crimes* (Torkel Opsahl Academic EPublisher: Beijing, 2012), pp. 315–66.

[20] Cohen, D. K. and Nordås, R., 'Sexual violence in armed conflict: introducing the SVAC Dataset, 1989–2009', *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 51, no. 3 (May 2014), pp. 418–28.

[21] Cohen and Nordås (note 20), p. 423.

[22] Muvumba Sellström, A., 'Stronger than justice: armed group impunity for sexual violence', Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Uppsala, 2015, p. 116,<http://uu.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:766398/FULLTEXT01.pdf>.

[23] See e.g. Smith, T. W., 'The polls: gender and attitudes toward violence', *Public Opinion Quarterly*, vol. 48, no. 1 (Apr. 1984), pp. 384–96; and Page, B. and Shapiro R.Y., *The Rational Public: Fifty Years of Trends in Americans' Public Preferences* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, IL, 1992).

[24] Regan, P. M. and Paskeviciute, A., 'Women's access to politics and peaceful states', *Journal of Peace Research,* vol. 40, no. 3 (May 2003), pp. 287–302.

generalizability of the persistent gender gap found in the United States however is open to question. This gap is less pronounced in other countries, and in some studies women have been found to be more war-prone than men.[25] Gender difference thus seems to be highly contingent on cultural context and the type of conflict. In addition, the explanatory power of biological sex is diminished once other factors, particularly feminist attitudes or attitudes to gender equality, are controlled for.[26] It seems highly likely that gender-equal attitudes, rather than biological sex, explain attitudes to violence. Research needs to focus more on these issues, and in particular on understanding how gender-equal attitudes affect men and conceptions of masculinity.

Gender equality appears to be associated with non-violent protest as a preferred strategy to violence when looking at the strategic choices of political organizations. Recent research has shown that organizations engaged in contentious politics are much more likely to opt for non-violent tactics, and less likely to resort to violence, if the organization espouses a gender-inclusive ideology.[27] Using a sample of 104 ethno-political organizations active in the Middle East, Asal et al. discuss the role of ideology and female participation, among other factors, in influencing how violent an organization becomes. They argue that a feminist perspective is connected with the choice of non-violent tactics, whereas patriarchal attitudes are related to violence. The authors stress that it is the active advocacy of policies that are inclusive of women that is important, not the presence of women as members of the organization.

Many studies show that states with a higher general level of equality between women and men are more peaceful in various respects. Measuring gender equality adequately presents numerous challenges, and most studies therefore use a number of different alternative indicators, such as the number of women in parliament, fertility rates, education levels, the duration of female suffrage and the percentage of women in the workforce. The association found between measures of gender equality and more peaceful outcomes holds up to the consideration of a host of alternative explanations. For example, gender equality has been found to be associated with less violent international conflict, a lower risk of armed conflict

[25] Tessler, M., Nachtwey, J. and Grand, A., 'Further tests of the women and peace hypothesis: evidence from cross-national survey research in the Middle East', *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 43, no. 3 (Sep. 1999), pp. 519–31; and Togeby, L., 'The gender gap in foreign policy attitudes', *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 31, no. 4 (Nov. 1994), pp. 375–92.

[26] See e.g. Conover, P. J. and Sapiro, V., 'Gender, feminist consciousness, and war', *American Journal of Political Science*, vol. 37, no. 4 (Nov. 1993), pp. 1079–99; and Tessler, M. and Warriner, I., 'Gender, Feminism, and Attitudes toward International Conflict: Exploring Relationships with Survey Data from the Middle East', *World Politics*, vol. 49, no. 2 (Jan. 1997), pp. 250–81.

[27] Asal, V. et al., 'Gender ideologies and forms of contentious mobilization in the Middle East', *Journal of Peace Research,* vol. 50, no. 3 (May 2013), pp. 305–18.

within states and civil war, and lower levels of human rights abuses by the state.[28]

Hudson et al. argue that the single most telling predictor of the degree to which a state is of concern to the international community linked to violent conflict, disregard for security-related international treaties and covenants or strained relations with bordering countries is a measure of the physical security of women in terms their level of protection against domestic violence, rape, and so on, in custom and law.[29] They found gender equality more informative in this regard than several competing factors that are often invoked, such as the persistence of democracy, level of wealth or influence of Islamic culture. These results show that state behaviour can be seen as strongly gendered—the more equality there is between women and men, the less likely a state is to be involved in violent conflict, violate treaties and covenants, or have strained relations with its neighbours.

Because conflict is highly gendered, it should not be assumed that peace automatically means the same for women as it does for men. Much feminist research has been directed at expanding discussion on the quality of peace and the need for it to be more equal.[30] Moreover, while conflict conserves gender roles in many respects, the end of conflict presents a window of opportunity for increased participation by women and the transformation of gender relations more broadly. In addition to presenting key questions about the quality of peace, research relates the effects of gender equality to the durability of peace, particularly in the context of international missions.[31] Peacebuilding and peacekeeping are more likely to be successful in societies where women have relatively high status.[32] That said, Beardsley

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[28] For gender equality associations with less violent international conflict, see e.g. Caprioli, M., 'Gendered Conflict', *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 37, no. 1 (Jan. 2000), pp. 51–68; and Caprioli, M. and Boyer, M. A., 'Gender, violence, and international crisis', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, vol. 45, no. 4 (Aug. 2001), pp. 503–18. For gender equality associations with a lower risk of armed conflict within states and civil war, see e.g. Caprioli, M. 'Primed for violence: the role of gender inequality in predicting internal conflict', *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 49, no. 2 (June 2005), pp. 161–78; and Melander, E., 'Gender equality and intrastate armed conflict', *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 49, no. 4 (Dec. 2005), pp. 695–714. For gender equality associations with lower levels of human rights abuses, see Melander, E., 'Political gender equality and state human rights abuse', *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 42, no. 2 (Mar. 2005), pp. 149–66.

[29] Hudson, V. M. et al., 'The heart of the matter: the security of women and the security of states', *International Security*, vol. 33, no. 3 (Jan. 2009), pp. 7–45.

[30] For an overview see Olsson, L. and Gizelis, T. I., 'Advancing gender and peacekeeping research', *International Peacekeeping*, vol. 21, no. 4 (Aug. 2014), pp. 520–28; and Olsson, L. and Gizelis, T. I., 'An introduction to Resolution 1325: Measuring progress and impact', eds. T. I. Gizelis and L. Olsson, *Gender, Peace and Security: Implementing UNSCR 1325* (Taylor and Francis: Abingdon, forthcoming 2015).

[31] Demeritt, J. H. R., Nichols, A. D. and Kelly, E. G., 'Female participation and civil war relapse', *Civil Wars*, vol. 16, no. 3 (July 2014), pp. 346–68.

[32] Gizelis, T. I., 'Gender empowerment and United Nations peacebuilding', *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 46, no. 4 (July 2009), pp. 505–23; and Gizelis, T. I., 'A Country of their own: women and peacebuilding', *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, vol. 28, no. 5 (Nov. 2011), pp. 522–42.

and Karim warn against oversimplified solutions.[33] They argue that in order to be effective, peace operations must work to broaden egalitarianism. For example, introducing gender quotas can have unintended consequences. On a related note, Bjarnegård and Melander point out that peacekeeping missions and peacebuilding efforts often take place in already male-dominated environments and institutions, where it is often difficult for women to influence decision making.[34] There is, therefore, a risk that the instrumental use of gender equality to promote security and peace might backfire if women are not given equal opportunities. If the desired effects fail to materialize, practitioners in the promotion of peace and security might infer that gender equality is unimportant. This concern underlines the need to study how precisely gender equality benefits peace.

Conclusions and looking forward

This chapter has highlighted the ways in which gender provides key insights into security and conflict. Modern history has seen dramatic developments in gender relations. In general, in most places and in most spheres relations between men and women have become less unequal, even if no truly equal society yet exists. If the studies that find a relationship between gender equality and peace are taken seriously, it follows that the decline in the severity of wars in recent decades can in part be attributed to advances in gender equality. This possibility is recognized in one of the most highly influential recent books on war and peace, Steven Pinker's *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence has Declined*. Pinker identifies what he refers to as 'feminization', defined as 'the process in which cultures have increasingly respected the interests and values of women', as one of five pacifying forces which he thinks explains the general decline in the level of violence.[35]

Sadly, this decline in violence may have been at least temporarily halted or even reversed in recent years.[36] It is striking that the recent increase in violence seems to coincide with the areas of the world in which gender relations have worsened substantially, in particular parts of Africa and the Middle East.

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[33] Karim, S. and Beardsley, K., 'Equal opportunity peacekeeping: the need for gender equality in the search for quality peace', Unpublished book manuscript.

[34] Bjarnegård, E. and Melander, E., 'Revisiting representation: Communism, women in politics, and the decline of armed conflict in East Asia', *International Interactions*, vol. 39, no. 4 (Sep. 2013), pp. 558–74.

[35] Pinker, S., *The Better Angels of Our Nature: The Decline of Violence in History and its Causes* (Viking Penguin: New York, 2011).

[36] Themnér, L. and Wallensteen, P., 'Armed Conflicts, 1946–2013', *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 51, no. 4 (July 2014), pp. 541–54; and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 'War's human cost', *UNHCR Global Trends 2013* (UNHCR: Geneva, 2014).

Perhaps Pinker's recognition of the importance of gender is a sign that mainstream analysts of war and peace have begun to learn from hitherto largely ignored research on gender. This chapter has shown that a broad range of studies substantiate the claim that armed conflict has gendered dimensions, in terms of women's and men's different roles as combatants and as victims, and that gender inequality plays a key role as a predictor of war and peace.

Moving forward, additional research is needed to disentangle what it is about gender equality that reduces the risk of conflict, and to identify the mechanisms involved. Systematic research would also help to either explode or confirm the myths about the role of gender in conflict. More importantly, it would provide incentives to invest in promoting gender equality—and thus a more secure society.