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# Achieving a Feminist Peace by Blurring Boundaries between Private and Public

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## 1. Introduction

In spite of increased attention to women's sidelining in matters related to peace and conflict, women continue to be marginalized in peacekeeping missions, peace negotiations and peacebuilding processes. Between 1990 and 2017, women constituted only two per cent of mediators, eight per cent of negotiators and five per cent of witness and signatories in all major peace processes (CFR & UN women 2018). Yet feminist research has long shown that states with higher levels of gender equality exhibit lower levels of violence during international disputes and crises (Caprioli 2009), and that the treatment of females within a society correlates with the security of states (Hudson et al. 2008/9), thereby providing instrumentalist reasons for striving towards a better gender balance following the end of conflicts. In addition, newer research has found a strong link between female political empowerment and civil peace (Dahlum and Wig 2018). While these arguments are instrumentalist, academics have also put forward rights-based justifications for increasing women's participation, pointing at women's right to not only participate but also to decide on the future of the post-conflict society. Both international institutions such as the UN and academic scholars therefore argue for women's need to be included in peace processes to build a greater post-conflict gender balance and a more inclusive and durable peace (Björkdahl 2012; Bouta et al. 2005; Council of Foreign Relations & UN Women 2018).

The fact that the post-conflict period may pose more threat to women than the actual conflict period (Handrahan 2004, p. 434) underlines the necessity to involve women in creating a more gender-equal post-conflict society and ultimately a feminist peace. Indeed, after conflict it is more likely that trafficking in women is established; for women to be forced into prostitution; for domestic violence to increase; for female slavery to be organized; for honour killings and suicides to occur and for gang rape to be prevalent (Handrahan 2004, p. 434), while in many contexts there

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is a spike in sexual and gender-based violence once the conflict between armed groups is stabilized (True 2012, ch. 8). This gives rise to feminist scholars' insistence on women's experience of a *continuum of violence*. The continuum of violence refers to the fact that women often experience endemic gendered forms of violence in their everyday lives, both before, during and after the end of a conflict. Yet the violence women experience in the private sphere is perceived as 'ordinary' and as such tolerated, while within the context of conflict, the violence is understood as 'extraordinary' (Swaine 2010). Often, only violence classified as 'extraordinary' exerts a response from society (Roy 2008).

How should a gender-equal, feminist peace be achieved then, and what does it entail? Drawing on previous feminist research, I define feminist peace as a peace where gender equality and women's empowerment is a goal in itself and not a route towards something else (Duncanson 2016, p. 58), and which likewise provides for social justice and equity while recognizing women's agency (Björkdahl 2012, p. 287). It is geared towards needs-based activity and a stronger concern for social welfare and justice and driven by both local and international actors (Richmond 2006, p. 301). While local ownership is crucial for a feminist and gender-equal peace, it does not legitimize local traditions which discriminate against women or other marginalized groups (see Gordon et al. 2015). The 'otherness' required for the creation of self-identity should therefore not imply inferiority, for example between genders, and dualisms and dichotomies should be challenged through dialogue and reconciliation (Duncanson 2016, p. 58). Clearly, such a peace is difficult to build and goes well beyond the mandate of international peacebuilders, yet if peacebuilding is to be transformative and not regress to the status quo, such challenges need to be confronted.

## Aim, Method and Theoretical Perspective

The overarching aim of this chapter is to analyse necessary conditions to build a gender-equal peace. Two conditions are identified as essential for enabling feminist peace: 1) expanding the notion of security to encompass private security and thereby tackle the continuum of violence, and 2) empowering women socio-economically and moving the focus from the individual's access to the socio-economic system to the structures which regulate and constitute it. This implies going beyond 'letting women participate' in a system conceived by and for men, towards transforming the system itself by addressing its discriminatory structures. To achieve these conditions, it is necessary to 'explode the private' (MacKinnon 1989, p. 191), and blur the lines between the public and private, the informal and the formal and trace how the two spheres are entangled and interconnected in a way that often silences and hides women's gendered

experiences. Blurring these boundaries entails addressing women's social and cultural obligations and in particular, the structural violence that constitutes normality for many women (Ní Aoláin et al. 2011, p. 64).

A critical feminist approach informs the analysis, which also means that I take a normative stance, clearly advocating the need for a more gender-equal peace, which implies a stronger involvement of and for women in the creation of the post-conflict society. Methodologically, the research for the chapter comes primarily from a thorough literature review of peace- and feminist- research. A discussion about the post-conflict backlash against women's agency sets the context of the article before a second part analyses security, violence and security actors, arguing for a need to address violence occurring in the private sphere. In a third part, the link between violence against women and their socio-economic status is unpacked, demonstrating the need for a stronger focus on empowering women economically and socially by reforming structures, rather than including individuals in gender-biased structures. The final part discusses how achieving both of these conditions: enlarging the concept of security and empowering women socio-economically, implies a blurring of the boundaries between public and private.

## 2. The Post-Conflict Backlash against Women's Agency

Armed conflicts may promote unintended opportunities for women to take on roles that are traditionally not available to them, as conflicts produce new political, social and economic opportunities that can in turn drive social transformations (Björkdahl 2012, p. 287). They may temporarily gain freedom, responsibility and thereby elevate their socio-economic status (Handrahan 2004, p. 435). In the absence of men who are fighting, women become the main breadwinners and heads of families: positions which nevertheless are rarely maintained in the post-conflict society. On the contrary, the post-conflict period has often meant a backlash against women's agency, frequently intertwined with nationalist ideas that are dependent on control over women's bodies, resulting in their confinement to the domestic sphere (Afshar 2003, p.185; Berry 2017; Björkdahl 2012, p. 289).

This post-conflict backlash is not only driven by the national patriarchy, which expects women to return to their subordinate positions, but can also be emphasized by the male international development community whose own notion of patriarchy as 'normal' may still be intact (Gordon et al. 2015, p. 3; Handrahan 2004, p. 435). Notwithstanding rightful feminist criticism regarding women in developing contexts being framed as victims in need of Western salvation (Kunz and Valasek 2012, p. 123), many developing states are characterized by broader patriarchal system

and traditions which discriminate against women in particular. However, this does not mean that these women have not been part of and contributed to international feminist networks and organizations, nor does it mean that they are helpless or in need of salvation. It does mean, however, that it is possible that there will be a clash between traditional, conservative customs and international norms about human rights, including women's rights (Naraghi-Anderlini 2008, p. 106; Wilén 2014). Kunz and Valasek note, for example that customary security and justice actors have been heavily criticized for perpetrating violence and/or discriminating against specific groups, in particular against women (2012, p. 125).

International peacebuilders are likely to either bring their own template for how to build 'liberal peace' or to build upon the local elites' vision of how peace should be rebuilt. While hybrid versions of the two are the most likely outcome, both of these visions accord quite limited socio-economic status and power to women mainly because men compose the majority of both the local elites and the peacebuilders. The post-conflict environment, just as the conflict itself, remains therefore centred around male power systems, struggles and identity formation (Cockburn and Zarkov 2002). It is, as Handrahan has framed it, a period where 'fraternities' – both national and international – compete over power (Handrahan 2004, p. 433). Here again, the distinction between public and private results in lesser influence for women: 'the male, public realm is where power and authority is exercised while the private sphere is the appropriate domain of women' and by understanding peacebuilding as mainly a public-sphere activity, we limit women's influence in peacebuilding (Björkdahl 2012, p. 290).

## 3. Enlarging the Concept of Security

The past few decades have seen a development of the concept of security, entailing a change in focus from a state-centric to an individual-centred focus, exemplified in the notion of human security. This development has taken place in the neo-liberal framework that dominated the post-Cold War era where women's insecurity fits well into discourses of development and security. Yet, as Hudson has pointed out, the emphasis on the 'human' or on 'women' does not necessarily imply a shift away from the narrow security conceptualizations; rather, there is a risk that the human security discourse may be misused to 'silence women or gloss over failures to address high levels of violence against women due to complacency vis-à-vis a so-called all-encompassing and therefore morally justified concept that puts 'people' first' (Hudson 2012, p. 78).

The notion of a people-centred security, although representing a much-needed turn in security debates towards the individual, may therefore fail to consider the specific security concerns that

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women face. The narrow focus on the public sphere when it comes to violence has long been criticized by feminist researchers who have put forward the notion of a 'continuum of violence', as an attempt to erase arbitrary distinctions of violence as either 'ordinary' and often hidden, pertaining mostly to the private sphere, or 'extraordinary' and overt, relating to violence in the public sphere (Roy 2008, p. 216; Swaine 2010). Yet, the 'ordinary' gender-based violence is similar to what Bourdieu has termed 'symbolic violence', which is the prerequisite for maintaining and perpetuating unequal power relations (Roy 2008, p. 218). Such ordinary violence both constitutes and is constituted by the underlying premises of a patriarchal system: men's superiority over women (Sjoberg 2014, p. 132).

**Disrupting the Continuum: Addressing 'Ordinary' Violence**

Violence that takes place in the private sphere, most clearly exemplified in the notion of domestic violence, is mostly perpetrated against women. Global estimates indicate that about 35% of women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime (WHO 2017). In South Africa, extreme levels of gender inequality and patriarchal values have been linked to the existence of what has been termed a 'rape culture' in the country (Baugher et al. 2010; Viitanen and Colvin 2015). Research suggests that non-consensual or coerced sexual intercourse is a norm in a South African woman's life (Jewkes and Abrahams 2002, p. 1240); South Africa indeed has the highest reported rates of violence against women than any country not at war (Peacock 2012), and as such, challenges the notion of a clear distinction between extraordinary and ordinary violence (Ní Aoláin et al. 2011, p. 71), perhaps becoming a prime example of Cohn's 'continuum of violence' (Cohn 2013, p. 21). Yet South Africa is not a unique case: intimate partner homicide accounts for approximately 40-50% of US femicides but only 5,9% of male homicides (Campbell et al. 2003). The presence of a gun in domestic violence situations increases the risk of homicide for women by 500% (Campbell et al. 2003).

The fact that the presence of a gun in domestic violence dramatically increases the risk of homicide for women establishes links between male security actors and violence against females. Previous research has shown that especially for the military institution, domestic violence constitutes a social problem (Adelman 2003; Hansen 2001). Due to the presence/prevalence of violence and weapons in their public functions, male members of the military risk transferring their use of violence into the private sphere. The use of physical force and high levels of stress added to the military's authoritarianism increase the risk of domestic violence, which makes female partners of male members of the military a specific risk category. Male military members

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are also more likely to use violence against their female colleagues than against men in other professions (Sadler et al. 2000). Murdoch et al. have shown how rates of reports of completed and attempted sexual assaults against female military members in the US were 20 times higher than reports by other government employees and an astounding 90% of the female respondents in their study reported sexual harassment while employed in the military (Carreiras 2017; Mathers 2013; Murdoch and Nichol 1995)[2]. Women in either a professional or private relationship with male members of the military therefore run a higher risk of being subject to violence and sexual harassment than others do.

What do these facts, which are drawn from states that are not subject to war have to do with creating a feminist peace? The fact that women are disproportionally targets of violence, perpetrated by men in the domestic sphere even in states that are at 'peace' demonstrates the failure to consider violence occurring in the private sphere. Given that most of this violence is directed towards women, it also illustrates how security is gendered, implying that human security is primarily by and for men. There is therefore a need to expand the notion of security to go beyond the public and extraordinary violence and into the private sphere to encompass ordinary violence (Wilén 2019). The fact that male security actors are more prone to use violence against women, both in the public and the private sphere, also alerts us to the point that security sectors are heavily gendered and informed by a patriarchal understanding of women's inferiority to men, a mind-set that ultimately has a negative impact on women's security. In sum, societies that are not safe for women are simply not safe (Ní Aoláin et al. 2011, p. 62).

## 4. Adopting a Feminist Political Economy Perspective to Empower Women Socio-Economically in the Post-Conflict Period

Feminist Political Economists (FPE) have long argued for the need to adopt a broader and more holistic perspective to understand the link between women's socio-economic position and violence against women. In particular, they have singled out neo-liberal economic globalization as a major obstacle to achieving gender equality and eliminating violence against women (Duncanson 2016; True 2012) – the same neo-liberal framework that has guided peacebuilding efforts during the past three decades. The imposition of neo-liberal economic policies in a post-conflict society often feeds into and exacerbates the war economies formed during the war. Pugh et al. have analysed and divided war economies into three categories: combat economy; shadow economy and coping economy (2004, p. 60). While the combat economy profits the armed actors and the conflict entrepreneurs, the shadow economy tends to profit the illicit businessmen and those who try to make a profit on the margins of the conflict. The coping economy, where the

majority of women tend to be found, is not about making profit, but about surviving (Pugh et al. 2004, p. 60). Both the combat economy and the shadow economy clearly profit from a weak state and a liberal and globalized economy.

Women are thus rarely present in the two profit-making categories of war economies, and as neo-liberal economic policies are likely to feed into these types of economies, they seldom benefit from peacebuilding interventions that adhere to a neo-liberal paradigm. Duncanson outlines three main reasons as to why neo-liberalism is seen as particularly damaging for women's socio-economic positions in a post-conflict context: 1) Neo-liberal policies entail cuts in public expenditure, like healthcare, education, childcare and parental leave, which are all services that women rely upon more heavily (2016, p. 65) because of women's informal responsibilities in the private sphere. 2) Women's formal employment is mostly concentrated in the public sector, which means that they are more likely to lose their jobs, and 3) The liberalization of trade results in low wages in the export sector, particularly in labour-intensive industries such as garment trade or electronics manufacturing (Duncanson 2016, p. 66). These macroeconomic policies therefore situate women in precarious forms of work where they are frequently abused and exploited (True 2015, p. 556).

The negative influence that neo-liberal economic policies have for women's socio-economic positions in post-conflict affected states is made possible because of the patriarchal system that already exists in the conflict-affected state. Worldwide, women are seen as subordinate to men, yet some societies are more strongly entrenched in the hierarchy than others – in other words, there are differences to the extent to which a patriarchal system influences women's status and power (Kandiyoti 1988). In many post-conflict states, patriarchy deeply colours traditional customs and practices and is justified through cultural and ideological means (Epstein 2007). To ignore these pre-existing structures, which strongly limit women's opportunities in the pre-conflict society, would be to overlook contextual and historical factors.

So, how can women be empowered socio-economically in the aftermath of a conflict? Women need to be part of the reform of the discriminating socio-economic structures that undermine their status and opportunities. In other words, it is crucial that women are not just 'allowed to participate' in a gendered system that ultimately reinforces their subordination, but that they are part of deciding how the system itself should be reformed in a more gender-equal way. As peacebuilding currently is a male dominated activity, engendering peacebuilding implies bringing in the voices and activities of women (Munro 2000). Women's participation should, however, not

be instrumentalized, as instrumentalizing often means that women are seen as having to undertake the lion's share of the labour – only to gain the same benefits as men. Yet, if women are instrumentalized to redefine the peacebuilding conditions, it can give them an opportunity to create liberating structures that ultimately empower all women (Duncanson 2018, p. 10).

More concretely, True evokes the fact that war crimes against women often tend to go unpunished, encouraging a climate of impunity for gender-based violence, just as neglect of land rights and reparations for wartime sexual and gender-based violence represent major hurdles to women's engagement in peacebuilding (True 2012, Ch. 8). While laws against gender-based violence are important to fight against impunity, reparations, often material, may allow women access to the post-conflict economy (True 2012, Ch. 8). Organizational reform and restructuring of the state institutions should include an emphasis on providing services that women benefit from, such as maternity leave, day care facilities and access to health care (See Connell 2006). Reforms that include compulsory paternity leave would also benefit women by broadening their economic and professional opportunities, while simultaneously opening up the chance for new, caring masculinities to develop (Wilén 2019). Such reforms would also blur the distinction between public and private in a way that gives more opportunities for both men and women.

It is clear that some of these reforms are difficult to implement in a post-conflict context where resources are scarce and institutions often fragile. Yet, in the immediate post-conflict period, many states enjoy strong support from external organizations, both in terms of human and financial resources. Here, external aid organizations could play a role conducive to gender equality by earmarking some of the budget to ensure that services such as healthcare and child care facilities are affordable and accessible to all. It is important to start building a gender-equal post-conflict society at the beginning of the peacebuilding process when institutions are malleable and change is systemic, rather than pushing reforms centred on gender equality to the future, when structures are likely to already have been cemented.

## 5. Conclusion: Blurring the Boundaries between Public and Private

Neo-liberal economic policies reduce the role of the state as a welfare provider in the aftermath of conflict while addressing extraordinary violence in the public sphere positions the state and its security sector as the main actor for providing security and monopolizing violence. These two peacebuilding efforts, which often go hand in hand, simultaneously undermine and strengthen the state's power, in a combination which is unfavourable to women's socio-economic status and security. Indeed, the neo-liberal approach risks brushing over gender inequalities or actions of

people as the outcomes of the 'choices' they have made as individuals (Connell 2006, p. 443), thereby failing to address the structural inequalities that underpin a gender-biased system. At the same time, the neo-liberal insistence on profit and business, deregulation and privatization hits women employed in the public sphere the hardest. As such, women's roles in the public are constrained and their involvement in decision-making and peacebuilding in the aftermath of conflict is limited.

At the same time, while the concept of security has been broadened to encompass individual security, and while peacebuilding efforts often entail a much-needed reform of the state's security sector, these developments have strengthened the state's coercive potential in the public while failing to address security and violence in the private sphere. Security sectors are traditionally heavily gendered, promoting a certain type of hegemonic masculinity, which also reinforces men's physical power over women in the public sphere, both as protectors and perpetrators. This development is not insignificant. As the previous section has demonstrated, females in a relationship with male security actors, whether private or professional, run a larger risk of being subject to violence. Somewhat paradoxically then, there is thus both a strong incentive for women to become part of the security sector in order to increase their influence and power, and a strong deterrent for taking the risk of being in a professional relationship with a male security actor.

In order to break the continuum of violence that women face, it is necessary to both expand the notion of security to the private sphere while at the same time empowering women socio-economically and elevating their status. For this to happen, there is need for a strong and legitimate state, which has the power to both deliver basic services to its citizens and to enforce laws against both extraordinary and ordinary violence, in the public and the private sphere. It is essential that women be part of the construction of this state in the post-conflict period, as it is the basis for changing discriminating structures and achieving a gender-equal, feminist peace.

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[2] As a comparison, 84% of women interviewed from the Swedish Armed Forces reported experiencing sexual harassment in the past 24 months, see Estrada and Berggren (2009, p. 177).