Gender, Militarism, and Peace-Building: Projects of the Postconflict Moment

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Abstract
Scholars have argued for decades about the relationship between biological sex and organized violence, but feminist analysts across numerous disciplines have documented the range and variety of gendered roles in times of war. In recent years, research has brought new understanding of the rapidity with which ideas about masculinity and femininity can change in times of war and the role of militarization in constructing and enforcing the meaning of manhood and womanhood. In the post–Cold War period, “new wars” (Kaldor 1999) have mobilized gender in multiple ways, and peace-building is often managed by external humanitarian organizations. A strange disconnect exists between the massive body of scholarly research on gender, militarism, and peace-building and on-the-ground practices in postconflict societies, where essentialized ideas of men as perpetrators of violence and women as victims continue to guide much program design.
INTRODUCTION

For anthropologists and other scholars grappling with the relationship between gender, militarism, and peace-building, the dispersal of materials across disciplines and genres can present a formidable challenge. Although massive, interdisciplinary academic and policy literatures exist in the separate areas of militarism and peace-building (and their cognates, including violence, terror, peace-keeping, and postconflict rebuilding), a significant portion ignores the question of gender and simply assumes that these processes are experienced in similar ways by all humans. Paris’s influential book *At War’s End: Building Peace After Conflict* (2004), for example, contains no index entries for “women,” “men,” or “gender” and presents detailed case studies in a classical international relations continuum to explore the impact of different types of peace treaties on the desired outcome of a conflict-free society. A recent argument for rethinking the conventional wisdom with regard to standard practices for implementing democratic reform and reconciliation among formerly contesting parties likewise avoids gendered language, referring only to disembodied “belligerents” and “key leaders” (Wolpe & McDonald 2008). Feminist writers, on the other hand, have often addressed the role of violence in maintaining gender inequality. The threat or use of physical force that is glorified and institutionalized in formal, state-based militaries can also be deployed in neighborhoods, households, and bedrooms, resulting in the systematic subordination of women (Elshtain 1987; Reardon 1985). Attempts to read these different literatures side by side suggest that it is apparently still common for political theorists and policy makers to exclude a gender perspective from their analyses; however, since the 1990s a series of United Nations conventions and changes in international law have made it more difficult to ignore.

The UN, the World Bank, and other multinational organizations regularly employ gender specialists, who are sometimes anthropologists, in their fact-finding and program-development process, and the ever-growing humanitarian and nongovernmental organization (NGO) communities are particularly sensitive to questions of gender inclusiveness. Two points become clear in any initial survey of the literature, however: (a) With some notable exceptions, the term gender is still commonly used as synonym for “women” and, (b) although most analysts of gender explicitly position themselves as feminists, a wide variety of theoretical positions and disciplinary perspectives are represented in the body of work on regional, and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management, and resolution of conflict” (United Nations 2000). The resolution was itself a product of both the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing and the “Windhoek Declaration” (also known as the “Namibia Plan of Action”), a document emanating from a seminar organized by the Lessons Learned Unit of the UN Department of Peace Keeping Operations, which called for a “gender mainstreaming” approach at all levels of conflict intervention and peace support (United Nations Secur. Coun. 2001). International criminal tribunals established by the security council to investigate and prosecute war crimes in the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, and Sierra Leone have pushed the legal definitions of gender-based violence and rape into the categories of crimes against humanity, leading to the emergence of new bodies of international law. An emerging body of critical legal scholarship is beginning to question the universalist assumptions built into transitional justice mechanisms and other strategies that seek to empower women, but too many postconflict reform projects continue to be grounded in static, overly simplified, or locally inappropriate notions of gender. In this review, I trace the points of articulation and disconnect between disparate literatures while pointing out the consequences of naturalizing either femininity or masculinity.
this topic. The literature is further divided into scholarly studies and policy recommendations, rapid assessment reports, and guidebooks for gender mainstreaming practices in such post-conflict projects as the demobilization of armed combatants, male and female, trauma counseling, and the retraining of both former fighters and civilians for economic development in the postwar period. Other peace-building projects with explicit gender components include transitional justice measures such as legal code reform, constitutional and governance restructuring, truth and reconciliation commissions, land tenure reform, and performances of “traditional” modes of conflict resolution. Given the space limitations of this article, I address the scholarly literature only, although the reader will find many references to broader sources of information in the references of these works.

MILITARY MEN, PACIFIST WOMEN?

The overall literature on gender, militarism, and peace has been shaped for close to 50 years by debates about the relationship between these terms; initially, innate biological differences were offered as an explanation for the near universal participation of men as warriors and women as victims and/or peace activists. Within anthropology and other disciplines, debates centered on the question of whether warfare was an inevitable outcome of male biology and was therefore impossible to eradicate from human life. Goldstein (2001) has exhaustively reviewed the cross-cultural evidence from anthropology, psychology, primate studies, and human biology and concluded that “minor biological differences” in combination with “cultural molding of tough, brave men who feminize their enemies to encode domination” (p. 406) best explain men’s near monopoly on organized violence, although neither factor is sufficient alone (see also Gusterson 2007). The impact of feminist theories in a number of academic fields, defining gender as fluid, variable, and multiple systems of femininities and masculinities, made possible a new formulation of the relationship. We know now that times of extreme violence, upheaval, and disruption are also times of profound change for gender ideologies and for relations between men and women. Rather than institutionalizing static, biologically determined patterns of behavior, militarization can promote rapid shifts in the way men and women behave toward each other, the work they do, and what they expect of each other and of themselves. Intimately connected with the process of organizing human and material resources into permanent, legitimate institutions concerned with armed force, militarism requires men and women to consider how their supposedly natural talents and abilities may be put to the service of a larger cause. In contemporary nation-states, militarization often encourages a new and explicit conceptualization of citizenship that may involve highly gendered notions of membership, contribution, and sacrifice. Feminist political scientist Cynthia Enloe, among others, has noted that neither brave soldiers nor patriotic mothers and widows are born; they are produced through gendered processes that require the deployment and mobilization of material and symbolic resources (1983, 1989, 1993). In some times and places, these processes reinforce and naturalize gender inequality, but they can also have the opposite effect. Anthropologists, with their long-standing constructionist view that genders are historically and geographically variable, have been slow to apply these theoretical insights to questions of militarization as a process, perhaps because, as Gusterson (2007) suggests, they have only recently begun to consider the discipline’s own positioning in the context of nineteenth- and twentieth-century militarization (p. 156; see also di Leonardo 1985).

Feminist scholars in fields such as philosophy, religion, political science, and international relations as well as anthropology began questioning the stark characterization of men as warriors and women as peacemakers in the early 1980s and have continued to do so in the face of enduring representations of these stereotypes in journalism and popular media (Cancian &
Gibson 1990; Cockburn 1998, 2002, 2007; Cooke & Woollacott 1993; Elshtain 1987; Elshtain & Tobias 1990; Enloe 1983, 1989, 1993; Fraser & Jeffery 1989; Jacobs et al. 2000; Lorentzen & Turpin 1998; Macdonald et al. 1998; Meintjes et al. 2001; Melman 1998; Reardon 1985, 1993; Ruddick 1983, 1989; Tickner 1992; Turshen & Twagiramariya 1998; Vickers 1993; Zalewski & Parpart 1998). A series of related topics have been addressed in this literature, including the differing experiences of men and women during wartime; differential rates of representation by sex among casualties and in refugee communities; the targeting of women for particular kinds of violence, usually rape or sexual mutilation; the consequences of men’s military mobilization for domestic violence, including marital rape and spousal abuse; women’s economic well-being, access to land, jobs, and other resources; and the impact of national military spending on the provision of state services. The growing literature on masculinity, particularly its militarized variants (Bowker 1998; Braudy 2003; Connell 1987, 1995, 2000; Gill 1997; Gillis 1989; Gutman 1997; Helman 1999; Highgate 2003; Kwon 2001; Moon 2005; Moran 1995; Peterson 1992; Wicks 1996), has contributed to the analysis of war and peace as gendered processes. Inspired by Anderson’s work on nationalism (1991), studies of contemporary forms of citizenship closely linked to military service showed that these were foundational to hegemonic masculinities subordinating most women and some men. The highly influential body of work by Enloe (1983, 1989, 1993, 2000, 2004, 2007) connected the incorporation of women into national armies, the global distribution of American military bases, world economic restructuring, and prostitution and sex trafficking, among other topics, to shifts in gender ideologies on a global scale. Responses to Enloe’s ideas formed the basis of an early collection on militarism, gender, and nationalism in anthropology (Sutton 1995) and paved the way for other anthropological studies of militarism and gender (Lutz 2001, 2009; Nordstrom 1997, 2004; Sunindyo 1998). From this body of research, militarism came to be seen as a process affecting all societies worldwide, regardless of whether they were actively engaged in war at any given time.

NEW WARS, NEW QUESTIONS
As local conflicts spread across the globe in the post–Cold War period of the 1990s, American anthropologists who had been able to ignore the militarization of their own nation-state were confronted by what Kaldor has termed “new wars” breaking out in their traditional field locations in Africa, Latin America, Eastern Europe, and elsewhere (Gusterson 2007, Kaldor 1999). The gender regimes of an increasing number of places were suddenly and demonstrably being transformed by processes of militarization; but rather than the state-sponsored, industrially driven pattern that had characterized the west in the first half of the twentieth century, these new wars were more likely to involve nonstate actors and directed much of their violence at civilian populations. Women were no longer confined to the home-front or even to the rear positions but instead were incorporated much more directly into the violence as both victims and perpetrators. As far back as the 1960s and 1970s, some Marxist feminists had speculated about revolutionary mobilization as a liberating process for women, one that would grant them full citizenship for their service in militarized state-making and would force their male counterparts to accept them as full equals. As outcomes of anticolonial and identity-inspired wars of liberation became clear, however, these hopes were largely disappointed (Afshar & Eade 2004, Altinay 2004, Bernal 2000, Conover & Sapiro 1993, El-Bushra 2004, Feinman 2000, Gautam et al. 2001, Goldman 1982, Hauge 2007, Jalusic 1999, Kumar 2001, Lomsky-Feer & Ben-Ari 1999, Luciak 2001, Lyons 2002, Makley 2007, Mama 1998, Manchandra 2001, Milles 2000, Molyneux 1985, Montoya et al. 2002, Moser & Clark 2001, Narikkar 2005, Pankhurst 2008b,
Shayne 2004, Tetreault 1994, Turshen 2002, Unger 2000, Utas 2005). Similar discussion swirled around the question of opening combat roles to women in the highly technologized militaries of the United States and other developed countries. Innovations in weapons design, resulting in smaller and lighter yet more lethal small arms, largely obviated the older discourses about whether women were biologically unsuited for combat. As these weapons flooded into the “new war” sites of Asia, Africa, and Latin America, the phenomenon of the “child soldier” became a focus of much research (Kaldor 1999, Rosen 2007).

At the same time, a different literature focused on women’s antiwar efforts, no longer assuming these were natural expressions of essential female nature but rather responses to the differentially devastating impact of the new wars on civilians. There had already been a vigorous debate about the relationship between motherhood and peace-building, some of which reprised the older naturalizing arguments but more importantly raised the issue of “moral maternity” (Ruddick 1989) as a basis for women’s solidarity and organizing. Feminists recognized the strategic value of such moral claims but worried that they played into the essentialized femininities that had long been excluded from the male realm of politics. Women’s grassroots movements for peace, sometimes crossing class and sectional lines, were credited in some instances with almost phenomenal success, not always accurately. Some of these movements undeniably led to new forms of agency and empowerment as women invoked moral positions as peacemakers in the face of seemingly intractable conflict (African Women Peace Support Group 2004; Amiri 2005; Anderlini 2007; Bouta et al. 2005; Castillo 1997; Clifton & Gell 2001; Cockburn 1998, 2007; Dolgopol 2006; Durham & Gurd 2005; Fitzgerald 2002; Gardner & Ely Bushra 2004; Giles & Hyndman 2004; Haq 2007; Harris & King 1989; Hunt 2004, 2005; Jacoby 2005; Jok 1999; Korac 2006; Manchandra 2001; Mason 2005; Marshall 2000; Mendez 2005; Moghadam 2001, 2005; Moola 2006; Moran & Pitcher 2004; Nakaya 2004; Pankhurst 2004; Povey 2004; Powers 2006; Rabrenovic & Roskas 2001; Ramet 1999; Rehn & Sirleaf 2002; Sharoni 1995; Zalewski & Parpart 1998). Careful attention to the different strategies used by women activists in diverse times and places has cast doubt on any single-cause theory of how conflicts are resolved and lasting peace is achieved.

Amid the tragedy and terror came a growing realization that the gains in organizational capacity and personal empowerment achieved by some women peace activists were difficult to sustain in the postconflict period. Furthermore, not all women had access to the limited number of leadership positions, even when these were transformed into electoral victories during peace time. It remains unclear just how empowering the experience of participating in peace demonstrations can be for ordinary women, although some individuals might translate these activities into personal decisions that improve their lives and relationships. For the most part, women’s visible roles in advocating for peace were often confined to street protests and other unofficial sites, whereas the conference rooms where treaties were negotiated remained male-only enclaves and postwar governmental positions went largely to the well-connected (Abdela 2004; African Women Peace Support Group 2004; Coles 2007; Corrin 2004; Frazier 2002; Mertus 1999, 2000; Porter et al. 1999; Rajasingham-Senanayake 2001). It was in this context, as well as in the aftermath of embarrassing reports about the sexual exploitation of displaced and refugee women by UN peace-keeping troops and civilian employees, that UN Resolution 1325 was passed. In effect, the resolution posits that the postwar moment represents a brief window of time in which wartime gains can be consolidated.

**THE AFTERMATH**

In the context of postwar peacekeeping by multinational organizations, new questions arose: Could militarized male troops adapt their behavior and expectations to peace-keeping

With increasing intervention from both multinational and nonstate entities in these local conflicts, external actors worked to ensure that the more positive gender transformations of wartime, like women’s new access to a public voice, could be continued in the peace-time context. Although terrible for those who had to experience it, extreme violence was believed to have the paradoxical effect of opening opportunities for more progressive, egalitarian gender relations in places that had previously been highly patriarchal. The moral claims of women who had acted as peace-makers as well as a general sense that men had failed to sustain reasonable governments created the context for legislative reforms, including gender quotas for elected representation at the national level (Bauer & Britton 2006, Tripp et al. 2009). But even as some postconflict societies, such as Uganda and Rwanda, registered enormous electoral gains for women parliamentary candidates and Liberians elected the first female president on the African continent, other analysts noted the significant backlash occurring for ordinary women. Rape and other forms of gendered violence have actually been seen to increase in the postconflict moment, over wartime levels, and attempts at legal reform often founder on limited institutional and human capacity to staff courts and retrain police, as well as on a lack of political will from successor governments (Pankhurst 2008b, Rehn & Sirleaf 2002, Turshen 2001, Vayrynen 2004). Where militarization had been seen as the source of women’s problems, the “return to peace” sometimes included a “retraditionalization” or re-assertion of prewar patriarchy (Turshen 2001).

Although the academics cited above have frequently been critical of the postwar reconstruction efforts of multinational institutions and NGOs, many practitioners in the humanitarian community remain fiercely committed to the idea of the postwar moment as a time when gender can be radically reconstructed. The gender mainstreaming called for in UN Resolution 1325 has generated a series of gender projects that are now included in the standard package of postconflict programming. These projects include attention to the disarming and demobilization of both male and female combatants, the training of foreign peacekeepers in their responsibilities regarding the sexual exploitation of local populations, the provision of extensive medical and psychosocial services to victims of sexual violence, and attempts to provide training in marketable skills and small-business development to displaced civilians and excombatants. Some of these programs founder on unexamined gender assumptions, as when men are offered training in auto mechanics and women are presented with classes in dress making or cloth dying, often in places where few people can afford either cars or new clothing (Utas 2003). Other peace-building projects, such as transitional justice and governance reform programs, as well as a host of democracy promotion and classical economic development programs, may not be explicitly about gender, yet their underlying assumptions about both the beneficiaries of the proposed changes and the sources of resistance reflect naturalized ideas of men and women. Implementation of these gender initiatives, even when funded by donations from the United States, European Union, or UN, is commonly contracted to private NGOs and humanitarian groups. Their activities have become a vibrant new area of ethnographic investigation by anthropologists (Abramowitz 2009; Abusharaf 2006; Anderson 1999; Boesten 2008; Burnet 2008; Coulter 2006; Crew & Harrison 1998; Fuest 2007, 2008; Hemmet 2007; Macrae 2001;
The idea that militarization and war create new opportunities for women has not always been supported by the evidence, as mentioned above. Why, then, should agents on the ground, both local activists and representatives of international organizations, persist in seeing at least some postwar situations as containing limitless possibilities and blank slate opportunities, assuming that gender as well as other relations of power have been erased and progressive outsiders can guide the survivors to a new, neoliberal paradise? Extreme violence might well lead people who have experienced it to be open to new ideas, but many who advocate this position tend to naturalize and essentialize violence as an outgrowth of male aggression, held in check by “good” social institutions (see Pankhurst 2008b, pp. 293–313). Having seen the horrors unleashed by undemocratic, or overly militarized, or nonliberal regimes, citizens are expected to demand social and cultural controls over men as a group, in the form of women’s civil and legal rights, enhanced rape laws, and new codes of domestic relations, not only for their own sake but as a check on future wars. This position, however, not only assumes that all men are to blame for the violence, but also discounts women’s prewar sources of legitimate political authority. Reduced to its essence, this is the message of such popular documentary films as Abigail Disney’s *Pray the Devil Back to Hell*, which represents the women’s peace movement in Liberia as arising entirely from the war itself. No mention is made in the film of the rich history of collective action by Liberian women, nor of the powerful ritual, social, and political positions they have held in the past. The horrors of war, paradoxically, are credited with freeing women to discover their own untapped potential and achieve liberation from their oppressive, patriarchal menfolk.

Another common assumption is that it is the dissolution of previous social relations, along with mass casualties that disproportionately impact men, that opens political space for women in postconflict societies. In the absence of the usual personnel to fill positions of authority, new candidates, often with the help of external change agents, step in to fill the gap. Although not as dismissive of men as the first model, this construct likewise assumes that prewar society had no space for women in authority-bearing roles and that women’s emergence as peace activists, organizers, and pressure groups is a radical break with the past. Finally, many of the external change agents subscribe to what can only be described as a civilizing mission oriented toward universalizing neoliberal discourses of individual human rights, gender equality, and other progressive goals. The postwar moment is explicitly framed as a valuable but limited window of opportunity, which will close quickly if not exploited to the maximum (Abramowitz 2009, Merry 2006).

In my own experience, returning to my previous research site in Liberia after more than 14 years of civil war, I found a widely circulated discourse that “women are traditionally considered property” was being invoked as an explanation for continuing high levels of rape and domestic violence in the postwar period. This was striking because I had never heard such an expression in the years before the war and because it was repeated by both foreign aid workers and by Liberians working with them. Both indigenous Liberian societies and the national political culture had been unabashedly patriarchal long before the war, but women had also held visible, highly authoritative positions in both rural and urban contexts. Although adult women were said to be “married to” their husbands’ families and unions were celebrated with the exchange of bridewealth, women retained membership in their own families of origin and exercised considerable rights over the labor of junior household members and collective resources in their roles as sisters and aunts. Moreover, they often acted collectively to assert their authority over areas considered within their sphere of expertise (including food production and marketing), to check the abuses of male leaders, and to demand protection for individual women (Moran 2006). Yet, in the
postwar period, everyone seemed to be asserting that sexual violence was somehow intrinsic to Liberian culture, although Abramowitz (2009) has turned to the ethnographic record to document carefully the history of sanctions applied to rapists and violent domestic abusers in the past, including banishment from the community and capital punishment. She argues that humanitarian organizations, many of them with explicitly feminist identities, have imposed “a specific framing of Liberian and African cultural history and heritage as being intrinsically, totally, and irreversibly patriarchal, dominant, violent, and oppressive” (p. 195; see also Hodgson 2005, Fassin & Pandolfi 2010). Very similar framings have been offered of the traditional culture of Iraq and Afghanistan to support U.S. military interventions ideologically in those countries and elsewhere (Abu-Lughod 2002; Kandiyoti 2008; Moghadam 2001, 2005; Razach 2004).

Feminist or women’s NGOs sometimes fail to recognize the power they wield in postconflict societies with high unemployment, limited infrastructure, and few sources of access to the resources and prestige controlled by foreigners. Members of one Liberian NGO described to me the agonizing decision to turn down an offer of funding from a foreign aid group that wanted to set up women’s health clinics specifically for “rape victims.” As the Liberian nurse heading the organization explained, not only would such clinics have stigmatized any woman seen entering the door, but also clinic workers would have been forced to deny health care to other women equally in need of their services, a requirement the staff found simply unethical. In their desire to address the special needs of women in postconflict societies, external actors can impose new, apparently life-long identities (such as rape survivor) and narrative frameworks that may be difficult for local activist women to resist. Likewise, postconflict survivors who fall into categories that are not recognized by powerful actors may have difficulty gaining access to services offered by the humanitarian community. Since 2006, I have been conducting interviews in Liberia with male noncombatants. Such men are nearly invisible in the scholarly and policy literature, which devotes enormous attention to the problem of reintegrating violent male excombatants but ignores the experience of men whose victimization often echoes that of women and children. Standard practices for disarming, demobilizing, and reintegrating former combatants typically include cash payments and vouchers for school tuition or vocational training and other relocation expenses in return for turning in a weapon or ammunition. Men and boys who had spent the entire war trying to avoid recruitment into armed factions and who had resisted the lure of looting and violence, however, qualified for no assistance because most programs for “noncombatants” consisted of rape counseling and were directed at women.

When I expained my project to a highly placed United Nations political affairs officer in Liberia, she expressed amazement that I could find any “men who did not fight” to interview. As one of my informants stated, “We are truly the forgotten men.” The masculine identities embraced by these men as alternatives to the militarized version of manhood so visible during the war could be models for the violent excombatants in need of rehabilitation who so concern the international agencies, if only these men were recognized. One of the most important themes to emerge, in more than 80 interviews I have conducted so far, is the role of senior women in either sending younger male kin to war or refusing them permission to join the armed factions. The authority of mothers, grandmothers, and aunts to deploy young men’s labor power to defense or other tasks is obscured by the discourse of prewar patriarchy just as the hiding and protection of men from involuntary recruitment are overlooked when women’s recognized peacemaking activities are limited to public demonstrations.

The massive body of scholarly work on gender, militarism, and peace-building seems not to have been incorporated into the essentialized, simplified images of violent men and suffering women that are neatly packaged for marketing and consumption by western aid
Interventions by anthropologists, with a more critical and longer time perspective on particular places, are sorely needed. According to Pankhurst (2008b), further specifying of the varieties of masculinity to emerge in times of both war and peace is particularly crucial; “we need to understand more about men who do not resort to violence, even when they have all the life experiences that would lead us to expect them to do so” (p. 312). She notes that the term femininity is not deployed in the same generalizing and deterministic manner as has been the case for masculinity; feminist scholars of militarism and peace-building have been careful to differentiate the “various and contrasting social roles, identities, sources of and constraints on power and control, access to and use of their own labor” for women, but they have neglected this task for men (p. 313). Attending to gender in all its aspects, she suggests, may be the best course for understanding how societies move from war to sustainable peace, and perhaps even for understanding how militarism as a process can be reversed or restructured. My current research with Liberian men who did not fight in the civil war attempts to take up this challenge, as no doubt will many others.

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