

# WHY DOES ARMED CONFLICT RECUR, AND WHAT HAS GENDER GOT TO DO WITH IT?

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Most conflicts in the world in this century have been civil wars taking place in poor and fragile states: in 2010 it was reported that every conflict started since 2003 was a recurrence of a previous one.<sup>1</sup> With this realisation in mind, the international community now devotes much attention to understanding how interventions in ‘post-conflict’ settings might be designed more effectively to minimise relapse. However, given the persistence of war globally, it is pertinent to ask how much progress has been made.

The field of gender and conflict, no less than that of state fragility and conflict, similarly faces the challenge of reality-testing. More than fifteen years after the passing in 2000 of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security (UNSCR 1325; enjoining women’s protection during conflict and their participation in peace building), little evidence has emerged of significant improvements in security levels for women in conflict-affected environments (or indeed anywhere). Nor has there been much progress in raising the profile of women in peace negotiations.<sup>2</sup>

To explore some of the factors that might contribute to our continued inability to prevent conflict and build peace, this working paper describes some of the ways in which the international community has sought to conceptualise persistent conflict, and asks whether incorporating a gender dimension into this analysis can enhance understanding and expand options for

effective intervention. It argues that neither conflict analysis nor gender analysis are unproblematic categories, however: the potential for better understanding will not be realised as long as conflict analysis is dominated by the liberal peace model and gender analysis means simply ‘add women and stir’. For conflict analysis to comprehend the breadth and depth of social relations, and in the process to generate more tailored interventions that better comprehend realities, it needs to undergo a paradigm shift towards thinking of conflict and peace as complex, iterative, many-layered, and dynamic processes, thereby opening up opportunities to be enriched by a nuanced understanding of gender relations.

Following an initial section providing a note on different interpretations of ‘gender’ in the context of conflict analysis and policy, the second section of the paper reviews how cycles of conflict are described in orthodox conflict analysis, how gender has been

situated within this, and the influence of this analytical framing on approaches to peacebuilding and state building. The third section presents alternative approaches, and suggests that interpretations of conflict that stress the importance of social process and identity would have advantages, including more fruitful integration of gender analysis.

## ‘GENDER’ IN THE CONTEXT OF ARMED CONFLICT

As a basis for later discussion, we first need to examine differences in perspectives within the ‘gender and peacebuilding’ field between those who see the need to prioritise a women-centred approach and those who advocate a broader gender analytical approach.<sup>3</sup>

Without wishing to overplay the distinction (their goals and concerns overlapping) it is nevertheless useful to identify the different



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aspects of the 'gender and conflict' problematic that these approaches each emphasise. The former, women-centred, approach finds its main expression in the 'Women, Peace and Security' (WPS) policy field, founded on the 2000 UN Security Council's Resolution 1325 and its sister resolutions passed over the following 15 years, aiming to clarify the nature of the international commitment and update the framework to take new security threats into account. These resolutions have strengthened the international community's commitment to addressing the needs of women and girls in war, ensuring their protection, taking their work as peacemakers seriously, and combating impunity for those who commit abuses against them, and have legitimised women's voice and activism in conflict and peace issues at the highest levels.

However, it is clear that large components of international discourse and practice have remained impervious to WPS. Moreover, even where this is not the case, WPS has not necessarily led to material changes for women on the ground.<sup>4</sup> Fears of a 'backlash' against women<sup>5</sup> have raised questions about how the required change can be achieved in practice, as well as about the conceptual basis for WPS. Stereotypes of women as passive victims and as peacemakers, and of men as perpetrators of violence, have

been called into question: real-life examples show women actively challenging their circumstances and participating actively and/or indirectly in war and violence. At the same time, men may be targeted as victims of war, and there are many examples of men resisting militarisation.<sup>6</sup> WPS is hampered by a lack of fit between international policy and local reality,<sup>7</sup> significantly also a feature, according to its critics, of liberal peace more broadly.<sup>8</sup>

Much attention in Security Council debates and resolutions has been devoted to sexual violence in conflict, almost exclusively sexual violence against women by men, often to the exclusion of other types of violence which should rightly be of concern too, such as 'everyday' domestic violence, sexual violence committed by civilians, sexual violence against men, and sexual violence committed by armed females. Security Council and other global initiatives aimed at countering violent extremism, an issue now addressed by WPS through UNSCR 2242 of 2015, have been accused of actually undermining WPS, on the one hand by instrumentalising women as informants and on the other by absorbing financial resources which might otherwise be due to WPS.<sup>9</sup>

The broader approach, often termed 'gender-relational', insists that gender analysis needs to address relationships within the 'whole society'. Moving away

- 1 Barbara F. Walter, "Conflict Relapse and the Sustainability of Post-Conflict Peace", *World Development Report 2011 Background Paper* (2010).
- 2 United Nations General Assembly and United Nations Security Council, *Women's Participation in Peacebuilding: Report of the Secretary-General, A/65/354-S/2010/466*, 7 September 2010.
- 3 Eleanor O'Gorman, *Independent Thematic Review on Gender for the UN Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) – Final Report* (2014).
- 4 Sanam Naraghi Anderlini, *What the Women Say: Participation and UNSCR 1325: A Case Study Assessment* (International Civil Society Action Network and MIT Center for International Studies, 2010).
- 5 Donna Pankhurst, "Gender Issues in Post-War Contexts: A Review of Analysis and Experience, and Implications for Policies", *Peace Studies Working Paper 9* (2007).
- 6 Judy El-Bushra, *Gender in Peacebuilding: Taking Stock* (London: International Alert, 2012).
- 7 Radhika Coomaraswamy et al., *Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing the Peace: A Global Study on the Implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325* (New York: UN Women, 2015).
- 8 Oliver Richmond, *A Post-Liberal Peace* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011).

from equating gender with women, it incorporates aspects of intersectionality theory,<sup>10</sup> since it seeks to deepen analysis by linking gender to other identity markers, such as age, social class, sexuality, disability, ethnic or religious background, marital status, or urban/rural setting.<sup>11</sup>

The distinction between these two understandings is relevant to a consideration of cyclical conflict. While the main emphasis of WPS is on identifying the impact of war on women and on strengthening policy to ensure their protection and their engagement in seeking remedies, the 'gender-relational' perspective sets this goal within a broader frame and hence encourages, amongst other things, an examination of gender as a contributory factor in violent conflict. Gender may be seen as 'causal in militarisation and war', with gender relations based on violent masculinities 'tend[ing] to feedback perennially into the spiraling continuum of armed conflict'.<sup>12</sup> Social processes that have accompanied civil wars have often 'reshaped a wide range of local social networks, destroying some, breaking others into subnetworks, and creating new ones',<sup>13</sup> with impacts and further impacts sometimes being noted decades later. In all these processes, however, no clear generalisations can be made about cause and effect, since the transformation of gender relations can go either forward or back under different conditions.

## CYCLES OF CONFLICT – THE ORTHODOX VIEW

### Mainstream understandings of violent conflict

To understand how the international community views recurring conflict, we must first examine its overall approach to conflict analysis. Mainstream approaches to understanding conflict, such as those evidenced in the work of the World Bank and the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), focus on drawing

conclusions based on rigorous quantitative evidence, and thus fall largely within an econometric perspective. Considering SIPRI as an example provides a flavour of this mainstream discourse. SIPRI defines 'conflict' as an event leading to at least 25 battle-related deaths in one calendar year, as compared to 'war', which requires at least 1,000 battle-related deaths in one calendar year. SIPRI's annual yearbook documents conflict trends and events, identifying the major timelines, players, and causal factors, and provides information on numbers of state-based (including interstate, intra-state, and internationalised intra-state) conflicts, non-state conflicts, and 'one-sided' conflicts, as well as the numbers of battle-related deaths in each conflict category.<sup>14</sup>

Analysis of this type has typically been carried out at a national level. For example, conflict assessment guidelines developed by the UK government's Department for International Development (DfID) focus on 'structures', 'actors', and 'dynamics' and on an assessment of DfID's own and other international actors' interventions; no mention is made of either the global political dimensions of conflicts or how men and women at community level contribute to, are violated by, and respond to, the conflict.<sup>15</sup>

This 'classical' approach assumes that conflict has a progressive trajectory, moving from latent to violent conflict and thence (under the benign influence of the international community) to peace negotiations, post-conflict transition, and eventually to permanent peace and stability. The distinction often made by the international community between ongoing conflict and post-conflict contexts is a key one, because categorising a particular conflict in these terms has implications for intervention and financing decisions. In ongoing conflicts, the aim is to support military containment, thereby helping to create conditions for a political solution. In post-conflict situations, i.e. after the signing of a formal peace agreement and a suitable

- 10 The concept of intersectionality was originally coined in Kimberle Crenshaw, "Mapping The Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics and Violence against Women of Color", *Stanford Law Review* 43 (1991): 1241–1299, as 'a way of framing the various interactions of race and gender in the context of violence against women of color'. It has since been developed further as discussed in Patricia Hill Collins, "Intersectionality's Definitional Dilemmas", *Annual Review of Sociology* 41 (1) (2015): 1–20.
- 11 Henri Myrtyinen, Jana Naujoks, and Judy El-Bushra, *Rethinking Gender in Peacebuilding* (London: International Alert, 2014); Carol Cohn, ed. *Women and Wars* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012).
- 12 Cynthia Cockburn, "Gender Relations as Causal in Militarization and War", *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 12 (2) (2010): 139–157, 152.
- 13 Elisabeth Jean Wood, "The Social Processes of Civil War: The Wartime Transformation of Social Networks", *Annual Review of Political Science* 11 (1) (2008): 539–61.
- 14 Lotta Themner and Erik Melander. "Patterns of Armed Conflict 2006–15", *SIPRI Yearbook 2016* (Stockholm: Swedish International Peace Research Institute, 2016).
- 15 DFID, *Conducting Conflict Assessments: Guidance Notes* (London: DFID, 2002). For a slightly updated version see also Stabilisation Unit, "Planning for Conflict and Stabilisation Interventions", *SU: What Works Series* (2014).

period of 'transition', the aim is to support the rebuilding of institutions in a way that minimises the risk of a return to war.

Much work on post-conflict reconstruction and development is based, implicitly or explicitly, on a desire to pre-empt a recurrence of conflict, thus addressing the issue of conflict cycles. However, in reality the international community may be equally influenced by pragmatic imperatives that limit the sustainability of outcomes. For example, perhaps conscious of the high levels of financial investment expected of it, the international community is sometimes over-hasty in encouraging a transition from 'ongoing' to 'post' conflict, before underlying conflict factors have been satisfactorily addressed. In this case it is likely that violence will continue to disrupt attempts at normalisation. As a case in point, men and women in Eastern DRC continued to experience their situation as 'war' long after the government and the international community had categorised the country as 'post-conflict'.<sup>16</sup>

Peacebuilding and diplomacy can bring conflicts to an end in some circumstances, as it has in Northern Ireland, though even here grievances continue unresolved and break out in unrest from time to time. These exceptions notwithstanding, examples abound of conflicts that the international community has misinterpreted in various ways, largely as a result of allowing facts on the ground to be obscured in conflict analysis by wishful thinking on the part of donors, often with disastrous effect. The DRC and Somalia are notable amongst these.<sup>17</sup>

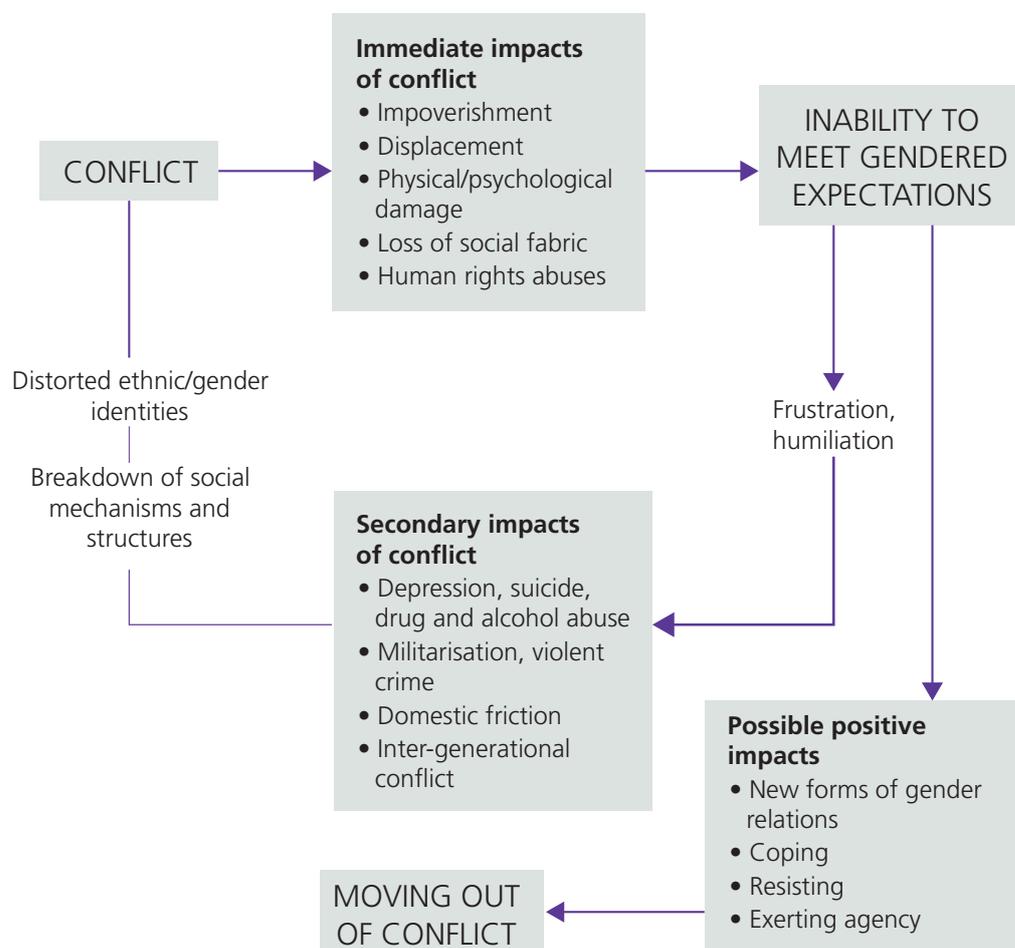
## Conflict cycles and the 'conflict trap'

Paul Collier, commenting from the perspective of a World Bank economist, sought to identify the circumstances under which some countries were perpetually unable, without major reform, to make the progress that others evidenced towards the well-functioning state, a state in which tendencies towards violent conflict would be successfully brought under control. Collier found that countries with poor economic and governance indicators were those most likely to experience a recurrence of conflict, since conflict was the enemy of development and vice-versa; he coined the phrase the 'conflict trap' to describe their situation and declared that 'the typical country reaching the end of a civil war faces around a 44 percent risk of returning to conflict within five years'.<sup>18</sup> This statistic, though the methodology it was arrived at was later questioned, was highly influential for a number of years and was adopted by a number of UN and other international agencies; for example it was cited as grounds for the establishment of the UN Peacebuilding Commission.<sup>19</sup>

Both within and outside the mainstream, however, the Collier approach has been contested. Astri Suhrke and Ingrid Samset, using Collier's own figures, revised his conclusion from 'half of conflicts recur within five years' to 'a quarter of conflicts recur within ten years', a shift which they pointed out might have significant policy implications. Further, they suggest that conclusions based on statistical evidence are illusory to the extent that they 'convey certainty and factual "truth" even though this may be false security'.<sup>20</sup> Critics also include those who see exclusionary politics as being as important as economic factors if not more so,<sup>21</sup> as well as those who urge attention to micro-level political relations.<sup>22</sup> Barbara Walter questioned whether previous exposure to conflict or a lack of political and economic responsiveness on the part of governments was the determining factor in war recurrence, a point of ambiguity in

- 16 Chris Dolan, "War Is Not yet Over": Community Perceptions of Sexual Violence and Its Underpinnings in Eastern DRC (London: International Alert, 2010). DRC still generates higher levels of displacement than any other country in the world, continuing violence having led to more than 900,000 new displacements over the course of 2016 according to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre. See Tharanga Yakupitiyage, "'Horrorific' Increase in Worldwide Displacement", *Inter Press Service news Agency*, 23 May 2017, <http://www.ipsnews.net/2017/05/horrific-increase-in-worldwide-displacement/>
- 17 Severine Autesserre, "Dangerous Tales: Dominant Narratives on the Congo and Their Unintended Consequences", *African Affairs* 111 (443) (2012): 202–222; Mary Harper, *Getting Somalia Wrong? Faith and War in a Shattered State* (London: Zed Press, 2012).
- 18 Paul Collier, V. L. Elliott, Havard Hegre, Anke Hoeffler, Marta Reynal-Querol, and Nicholas Sambanis, *Breaking the Conflict Trap: Civil War and Development Policy* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2003), 83.
- 19 Astri Suhrke and Ingrid Samset, "What's in a Figure? Estimating Recurrence of Civil War", *International Peacekeeping* 14 (2) (2007): 195-203.
- 20 Suhrke and Samset, "What's in a Figure?", 199.
- 21 Charles Call, *Why Peace Fails: The Causes and Prevention of Civil War Recurrence* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2010).
- 22 Joakim Kreutz, "Dismantling the Conflict Trap: Essays on Civil War Resolution and Relapse", Department of Peace and Conflict Research, University of Uppsala (2012); Louise Wiuff Moe, *Addressing State Fragility in Africa: a need to challenge established 'wisdom'?* (Helsinki: Finnish Institute of International Affairs and Crisis Management, 2010).
- 23 Walter, "Conflict Relapse".
- 24 World Bank, *World Development Report 2011; Conflict, Security and Development* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2011).
- 25 World Bank, *World Development Report 2017: Governance and the Law* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2017).

## Gender identities and conflict – a tentative model of possible links



Collier's account, and concluded that it was the latter.<sup>23</sup> It was this lack of political responsiveness that featured as the main explanation for cyclical conflict in the eventual definitive World Bank statement on conflict, the 2011 World Development Report (WDR).<sup>24</sup> Subsequent WDRs, while addressing a range of other topics, have largely incorporated this political emphasis, as for example the 2017 WDR on governance and law.<sup>25</sup>

The 2011 WDR represents a small but observable shift in the international discourse around conflict, away from the rigidity of linear models and towards a stronger interest in addressing complexity, suggesting a view

of conflict as an evolving and shifting process. It proposes that globally conflict may change its nature, and notes an increasing trend towards large-scale organised criminal violence as distinct from politically-driven rebellion. It cautions that cause and effect can be difficult to tease out, and that the move away from fragility and violence to institutional resilience should be expected to take place in spiral fashion rather than in a neat linear progression. However, the overall tenor of global discourse continues to be unidirectional, macro-focused, and, as we see below, masculinised.

## The orthodox view as policy frame

The point is important because of the influence of orthodox thinking on international responses to specific conflict contexts. The concept of the 'conflict trap' feeds directly into the concept of the liberal peace,<sup>26</sup> a policy approach that provides justification for the international community to intervene (including militarily) in the affairs of countries whose governments it labels as morally or politically unacceptable. Spiral diagrams or not, the overall model in orthodox thinking continues to be one in which repeated cycles of conflict are the result of weak state institutions unable to replace the dynamics of war with dynamic state-citizen interaction. It still aspires towards a progressive pathway from pre-conflict, through active conflict, to post-conflict, and thence to social and economic reconstruction via liberal peace interventions from the international community, leading ultimately to the re-establishment of a permanently viable state. Reality, on the other hand, tends to be messier, driven by local dynamics rather than – and sometimes in direct conflict with – global policy imperatives.<sup>27</sup>

The orthodox conflict model finds further expression in the statebuilding approach currently favoured under the New Deal for Fragile and Conflict Affected States (FCAS).<sup>28</sup> The concept of FCAS reflects the concern of major donors that their investments in post-conflict recovery have failed to lead countries emerging from civil war to the golden dawn predicted for them. Statebuilding, with its five key goals (legitimate politics/political settlements, security, justice, economic foundations, and revenues and services) has emerged as a key policy response to the phenomenon of FCAS, promoting the reform of institutions and encouraging measures to improve state functionality and responsiveness, specifically in cases where persistent conflict threatens global security.<sup>29</sup>

## 'Add women and stir'?

To what extent has the Women, Peace, and Security agenda, as set out in UNSCR 1325 and its sister resolutions, influenced mainstream conflict analysis? Has the concern with the metrics of conflict duration and recurrence made common cause with WPS? Belatedly and occasionally, yes. Some examples merely provide further illustration of the incongruity of reducing complex debates to a percentage. Laurel Stone, for example, reviewing official records of peace negotiation processes, concludes that 'encouraging [women's] participation increases the probability of violence ending within a year by 24% ... implementing gender quotas for national legislatures could increase the probability of violence ending within five years by 27%'.<sup>30</sup> Somewhat more substantially, Mary Caprioli has demonstrated statistical correlations between certain gender equality indicators and a country's propensity for peacefulness.<sup>31</sup> And although the World Bank's 2011 WDR is essentially a gender-free zone, subsequent research within the World Bank explored what gender-disaggregated evidence might add to the analysis of 'conflict traps'.

Resulting from this research, Myra Buvinic and colleagues assert that gender difference adds an important dimension to conflict analysis and has implications for intervention design, especially since one of their findings is that the gendered impacts of conflict are not necessarily consistent across cases.<sup>32</sup> Based on a review of quantitative evidence gathered from a wide range of conflict contexts, the authors frame their analysis around two levels of conflict impact, both of which have gendered implications. For them, first-round impacts differ between men and women and include: a) an increase in mortality and morbidity (mainly of young men and children) and widowhood (for women); b) forced migration; c) loss of assets and income; d) sexual and gender-based violence. Second-round impacts consist of household adaptations to the

26 Suhrke and Samset, "What's in a Figure?".

27 Susanna Campbell, David Chandler, and Meera Sabaratnam, eds., *A Liberal Peace? The Problems and Practices of Peacebuilding* (London: Zed Books, 2011).

28 The New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States, agreed in Busan in November 2011, brought fragile states and donors together around five Peacebuilding and Statebuilding Goals (PSGs) and set out agreed roadmaps for their implementation in specific countries. See <http://www.pbsdialogue.org/>

29 OECD, *Supporting Statebuilding in Situations of Conflict and Fragility: Policy Guidance* (OECD Publishing, 2011).

30 Lauren Stone, "Can Women Make the World More Peaceful?" *The Guardian*, 11 August 2014.

31 Mary Caprioli, "Gendered Conflict", *Journal of Peace Research* 37 (1) (2000): 51–68; Mary Caprioli, "Primed for Violence: The Role of Gender Inequality in Predicting Internal Conflict", *International Studies Quarterly* 49 (2) (2005): 161–178.

32 Myra Buvinic, Monica Das Gupta, Ursula Casabonne, and Philip Verwimp, "Violent Conflict and Gender Inequality: An Overview", *The World Bank Research Observer* 28 (1) (2012).

loss of male breadwinners and to the demographic imbalance that results; these include, in many cases, increased economic and political activity on the part of women.

These first and second-round impacts themselves have further repercussions for the economic, political, and social fabric, and hence for recovery capacity. They should therefore be taken into account in the design of interventions, for example in projects addressing needs for education, financial, or judicial services, if the international community is to make inroads into the 'conflict trap'. The review suggests that 'gender inequalities shape and are shaped by the responses of households to violent conflict'.<sup>33</sup> It concludes that gender is an important variable; giving it sufficient attention would enhance the macro policy community's efforts to understand the dynamics of conflict and develop more effective means of supporting people affected by it, both in first-round impacts and in second-round adaptations.

Policy frames falling within the orthodox discourse, as well as associated practice, have also had trouble incorporating a gender dimension. Women's rights and well-being (and if gender is taken into account at all it is generally in the form of 'women's issues') frequently find themselves at the centre of the potentially destructive convergence of two forces, local dynamics and global policy, with the managers of the liberal peace seemingly at a loss mediating the tension between them.<sup>34</sup> As far as the statebuilding discourse is concerned, for example, this has been spectacularly ungendered, and the component processes of the statebuilding framework have largely excluded women.<sup>35</sup> This is in spite of OECD's own emphasis on the need for inclusivity and state-citizen dialogue at all stages of the process.<sup>36</sup> As with WDR 2011, gender has been added in at a late stage;<sup>37</sup> however, there has been little investment to date in researching potential links between gender and statebuilding, and hence little hard evidence to support gender policy in statebuilding<sup>38</sup> – or indeed

to support statebuilding as a strategy for gender equality.

The exclusion of women (and other politically subaltern or marginalised groups) as statebuilding participants has particularly grave outcomes when it occurs in the (typically early) phases of the statebuilding process which are concerned with political settlements. Those engaged in peace negotiations and in the establishment of political settlements are generally under pressure to satisfy the demands of the previously warring parties, as a first and most urgent step in maintaining security, and to postpone the introduction of broader and more inclusive settlements until post-transition. Indeed, participants in peace negotiations have been known to exclude women explicitly, on the grounds that they did not form a defined party to the armed conflict,<sup>39</sup> thus ignoring both the fact of their active participation in armed groups and their legitimate interests in the terms of post-conflict settlements. As the OECD itself acknowledges, the time for broadening opportunities for participation is at the negotiation stage, before the shape and culture of newly-formed institutions becomes established. Once reconstruction begins, the practices and norms of the power-holders are likely to dominate the conduct of state-citizen relations.<sup>40</sup>

In summary, the way cyclical or recurrent conflict is described in the mainstream is shaped by an econometric approach, which seeks to measure the incidence of conflict, define its typologies, and assess the factors that contribute to it based on quantifiable data. Although conclusions based on statistical evidence may be useful as contributions to arguments around macro policy, they throw little light on the complexities of lived realities. Orthodox analysis, which forms the basis of resourcing and policy decisions governing international action on conflict, falls within, and supports, a liberal peace approach to international relations, ultimately seeking to identify the scope for 'western' responses to and intervention in conflict hotspots. Despite

33 Buvinic et al, "Violent Conflict and Gender Inequality", 131.

34 Torunn Wimpelmann Chaudhary, Orzala Ashra Nemat, and Astri Suhrke, "Promoting Women's Rights in Afghanistan: The Ambiguous Footprint of the West", in *A Liberal Peace?* ed. Campbell, Chandler, and Sabaratnam: 106-120.

35 Clare Castillejo, "Building a State That Works for Women: Integrating Gender into Post-Conflict State Building", *FRIDE Working Paper 107* (2011). See also Saferworld's assessment of civil society engagement in the New Deal process for Somalia, the first (and to date only) country to be given the full New Deal treatment: Saferworld and World Vision, *Strengthening the New Deal from the Bottom Up: Perspectives on the Somali Compact and Somaliland Special Arrangement (SSA)* (London: Saferworld and World Vision, 2014).

36 OECD, *Supporting Statebuilding*.

37 OECD, *Gender and Statebuilding in Fragile and Conflict-Affected States* (OECD Publishing, 2013).

38 Pilar Domingo, Rebecca Holmes, Alina Rocha Menocal, Nicola Jones, and Jill Wood, *Assessment of the Evidence of Links between Gender Equality, Peacebuilding and Statebuilding - Literature Review* (London: ODI, 2013).

39 Anne Itto, "Guests at the Table? The Role of Women in Peace Processes", in *Conciliation Resources, Peace by Piece: Addressing Sudan's Conflicts* (London: Conciliation Resources, 2006): 56-59.

40 OECD, *Gender and Statebuilding*.



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the ‘moral capital’ that the liberal peace approach seeks to gain from the discourse around women’s rights, mainstream conflict analysis retains a masculinised character. Where gender figures at all within this framework, it merely offers an additional – though valuable – layer of data disaggregation, constrained by its conceptual parameters in its ability to interpret and explain, as well as record, the data it uncovers. Little attempt has been made within this framework to draw on feminist or peacebuilding traditions that might assist with understanding the social processes that are involved in conflict and peace, rather than simply with their measurement.

## A BROADER APPROACH

### Opening up the framework

Orthodox conflict analysis focuses on a relatively narrow range of contexts and examines a simplistic array of causal factors. Scholarship outside the mainstream reveals that broader understandings lead to richer insights and have greater potential to identify effective strategies for change.

The mainstream approach to conflict analysis tends to focus on situations of mass organised violence, specifically those that display features triggering identification by the international community as ‘conflict’

or ‘post-conflict’. Alternative approaches see ‘war’ as one manifestation of conflict among many – one end, perhaps, of a continuum that also includes other forms of organised and unorganised violence, and which stretches to situations that are neither but that have potential for violence if mismanaged. Working on conflict defined as social and political divisions and ‘conflicts of interest’ in more ‘normal’ situations is also important. Using the word ‘conflict’ in this broader sense, we should recognise that it is integral to society – indeed, to social progress,<sup>41</sup> and that it holds the potential for positive change, possibly through ‘stabilising points’ (people or institutions who can provide stability when all around them is collapsing)<sup>42</sup> or ‘connectors and local capacities for peace’.<sup>43</sup>

The orthodox framework overlooks a broad spectrum of dimensions, including the social and psychosocial dimensions and related issues of cohesion, identity, and history. Violent conflict is more likely in contexts where integration between different forms of social capital is weak, social capital being composed of vertical linkages (between citizens and state) and horizontal linkages (membership of and networking across institutions such as the family or clan). Social cohesion is manifested in high levels of civic engagement and a well-functioning state, *both* being requirements for social

and economic development and for effective conflict management.<sup>44</sup> Much ink has been spilled in contentions over the issue of ethnicity - or perhaps more accurately the manipulation of ethnic identity and ethnic discourse - as a possible explanation for recurrent genocides, for example in Central Africa.<sup>45</sup> History shows that underlying tensions and grievances often recur cyclically, possibly in different forms, over decades if not centuries; the knowledge of violence can be transferred from one generation to another, and informs not only the fact of war but also the intensity of the violence. For example, it has been suggested that some of the roots of the civil war in Liberia can be found in the experience of slavery undergone by American Liberians,<sup>46</sup> and that the cruelty inflicted by the Belgian colonial power in the Congo found later expression in present-day civil war behaviour.<sup>47</sup> The roots of recurring conflict, then, may be sought in the behaviour of past generations as well as in current structures.

## Infusing a relational gender analysis

In what way has gender informed less orthodox approaches to explaining conflict recurrence? An example can be found in research by the development agency ACORD addressing the connection between gender and conflict in specific communities in Sudan, Somalia, Mali, Angola, and Uganda.<sup>48</sup> Firstly, the study found that the gender division of labour generally changed as a direct result of violent conflict, often drastically, though not necessarily permanently. In particular, men, having lost access to the resources (such as land, labour, or commercial networks) on which their power was formerly based, found great difficulty in adapting to changed economic circumstances, and fell into a state of despondency. In contrast, women tended to rise to the occasion by exploiting whatever economic niches could be found, and often took over practical responsibility for provisioning and protecting

their families, whether or not their menfolk were with them. Other studies have reached similar conclusions.<sup>49</sup>

In assessing changes to gender relations however, a distinction needs to be made between gender *roles*, which the ACORD study identified as being highly responsive to the demands of a changing environment, and gendered *institutions and ideologies*, which were more or less impervious to change. In particular, to the extent there was any change in women's standing within the household and community, it was only partial. The general impact of conflict on women was to widen their responsibilities and increase their workload (albeit in ways they often relished) while *not* providing them with decision-making responsibility. Whatever adaptations were necessary for practical reasons to the gender division of labour, these did not necessarily shake the ideological foundations of gender relations. The much-vaunted 'window of opportunity' presented by the post-conflict moment was therefore shown to be illusory, as long as conscious efforts permanently to restructure social relations were not made.

- 41 International Alert, *Programming Framework for International Alert: Design, Monitoring and Evaluation* (London: International Alert, 2010).
- 42 Chris Roche, "Operationality in Turbulence: The Need for Change", in *Development in States of War: Selected Articles from Development in Practice*, ed. Deborah Eade (Oxford: Oxfam, 1996): 15-25.
- 43 Mary B. Anderson, *Do No Harm: How Aid Can Support Peace - or War* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Reiner, 1999).
- 44 Nat Colletta and Michelle Cullen, *Violent Conflict and the Transformation of Social Capital: Lessons from Cambodia, Rwanda, Guatemala and Somalia* (Washington DC: World Bank, 2000).
- 45 Rene Lemarchand, *The Dynamics of Violence in Central Africa* (University of Pennsylvania Press: 2009).
- 46 Morten Bøås, "Liberia - the Hell-Bound Heart? Regime Breakdown and the Deconstruction of Society", *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 22 (3) (1997): 353-379.
- 47 Mark Dummett, "King Leopold's legacy of DR Congo violence", *BBC News*, 24 February 2004, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/3516965.stm>
- 48 Judy El-Bushra, "Fused in Combat : Gender Relations and Armed Conflict", *Development in Practice* 13 (2/3) (2003): 252-265.
- 49 Olivia Bennett et al, eds., *Arms to Fight, Arms to Protect: Women Speak Out About Conflict* (London: Panos Institute, 1996) provides a comprehensive study from conflicts in 20 different countries.



Alternative approaches see 'war' as one manifestation of conflict among many – one end, perhaps, of a continuum that also includes other forms of organised and unorganised violence, and which stretches to situations that are neither but that have potential for violence if mismanaged. Working on conflict defined as social and political divisions and 'conflicts of interest' in more 'normal' situations is also important.

The study also identified a range of other impacts, including increased reliance of households on petty commerce, changes to patterns of marriage and courtship including the deployment of sexuality (for both men and women) as a means of achieving economic security, a reduction in the authority of older men, a breakdown in traditions of socialisation of children within the household and increased intergenerational mistrust, and increased levels of domestic and sexual violence, especially where the availability of light weapons was accompanied by poor employment opportunities for young men. Many of these impacts have a demonstrable effect on the future coping capacities of societies emerging from violent conflict, generating the need for further adaptations and creating further stress in populations already coping with overwhelming disruption. These insights undermine the presumption of orthodox conflict analysis that conflict is to be measured in numbers of battle deaths and to be explained exclusively by the machinations of warlords and financiers, whose elimination will herald a sustainable peace.

A further finding was that although the differential impacts of conflict on men and women was significant, these went hand in hand with differential impacts on other categories – on different ethnic groups, on different economic classes, or on displaced as against settled population groups. In northern Mali, for example, armed conflict contributed to the detachment of ex-slaves from their erstwhile masters, thus reducing the workloads of ex-slave women while obliging noble women to take up economic roles within the household. In southern Somalia, one result of the 1991-2 war was the polarised fortunes of different clans, which in turn shaped differential impacts on their men and women. Vulnerability is not confined to women, nor is it universal among women: war tends to bring particularly savage disadvantage to those who are already vulnerable, whether they are male or female. This conclusion lends

relevance to an understanding of gender that incorporates intersectionality, and supports the call for a multi-dimensional and relational understanding of gender not exclusively focused on women.

In all five country settings, patriarchal struggles for power and control of resources were implicated in war, both at the macro-political level and in terms of local and domestic violence. Much violence was driven by intolerance, greed, intransigence over religion, national level struggles for armed supremacy, and aggressive forms of masculinity aiming to ‘restore the possibilities of ethnic and gender identity’.<sup>50</sup> A key question then is how the emergence of this aggressive masculinity was enabled. At the individual level, it is not hard to trace the links between perturbations of masculine ideals on the one hand and violence on the other. Indeed, a different ACORD study focusing on men in Uganda had identified ‘thwarted’ gender identities as a key generator of domestic violence and self-harm by men. While male gender identities might not have changed radically, the possibilities of attaining masculine ideals had been severely curtailed.<sup>51</sup> This insight suggests one way in which the examination of relational gender dynamics may prove fruitful in teasing out complex and cross-cutting interactions between conflict impacts.

In the panoply of consequences and further knock-on effects identified through these studies, gender and ethnic identities are either threatened or reinforced by conflict processes, with multiple possibilities for the further consequences of each. The violence of war typically leads to loss of life, loss of livelihood, poverty, humiliation and frustration, failures of governance, political manipulation, and breakdown of inter-communal relations; in turn these effects generate further manifestations of violence, including, for example, domestic and sexual abuse, alcoholism and drug abuse, depression, suicide, armed criminality, and adherence to militias. These in turn reinforce poverty and humiliation, further embedding conditions

50 El-Bushra, “Fused in Conflict”, 262.

51 Chris Dolan, “Collapsing Masculinities and Weak States – a Case Study of Northern Uganda”, in *Masculinities Matter! Men, Gender and Development*, ed. Francis Cleaver (London: Zed Books, 2002): 57–83.

52 International Alert, *Programming Framework*, 15.

53 United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office, *UN Peacebuilding: An Orientation* (New York, NY: UNPBSO, 2010), 5.

54 Caprioli, “Primed for Violence”; Caprioli, “Gendered Conflict”.

55 Nikki Kandirikirira, “Deconstructing Domination: Gender Disempowerment and the Legacy of Colonialism and Apartheid in Omaheke, Namibia”, in *Masculinities Matter: Men, Gender and Development*, ed. Francis Cleaver (London: Zed Books, 2002): 112–137.

56 Colette Harris, “The Importance of Post-Conflict Socio-Cultural Community Education Programmes: A Case Study from Northern Uganda”, *MICROCON Research Working Paper 64* (2012).

57 Myrtingen et al, *Rethinking Gender in Peacebuilding*.

which perpetuate war, and leading to a general reduction in social cohesion and social capital, rendering the communities concerned vulnerable to continuing fragmentation. Gender identities are deeply implicated in this cycle, being key factors in people's perceptions of their social roles and positions. This suggests that they must equally be implicated in the processes whereby societies pull out of conflict cycles to build peace.

## Gender and peacebuilding

Conflict analysis can be judged a useful activity inasmuch as it forms a basis for identifying actions that contribute towards peace. Peace happens when 'people are anticipating and managing conflicts without violence, and are engaging in inclusive social change processes that improve the quality of life',<sup>52</sup> and peacebuilding is a 'range of measures targeted to reduce the risk of lapsing or relapsing into conflict... to lay the foundations for sustainable peace and development'.<sup>53</sup> While causes of conflict may be both internal and external, and be situated at micro, meso, and macro levels, the resilience of populations most directly affected by it is a factor of key significance in determining outcomes.

If gender is implicated in ongoing cycles of violence, the test of this is to be seen in efforts to reduce violence by re-negotiating gender relations. As mentioned above, statistical correlations have been identified that suggest that countries scoring highly on women's rights criteria may be relatively immune to either international or internal war.<sup>54</sup> There is contextualised evidence too that at the level of households and communities, dialogue processes that support a rethinking of gender identity can help bring an end to cycles of violence. In Namibia, the 'bad behaviour' of young men (and to a lesser extent young women), which community members had identified as having reached crisis proportions, was seen to stem from the country's long history of apartheid. Even in remote rural areas, apartheid had created extreme

power inequalities between men and women, as well as between ethnicities. The communities then concluded that the focus should be on unravelling these historic power inequalities, rather than on blaming the young men concerned;<sup>55</sup> the results were so powerful that they eventually led to major changes in the Namibian education system. Secondly, an education project in Northern Uganda achieved significant reductions in domestic violence as well as other positive impacts through a year-long process of dialogue between young and old men and women, aimed at improving gender and intergenerational relations.<sup>56</sup>

These examples demonstrate how vicious circles of conflict can be transformed into virtuous ones, since they contain stabilising points as well as thresholds for new departures, points at which gender identities can, with sufficient will, be turned round to generate new and more constructive sets of relationships. They further suggest that the potential for gender analysis to contribute to peace is maximised when 'gender' is understood not only as a campaign for women's rights (important though that may be) but rather as a framework for analysing situations from the points of view of a wide range of actors, thereby opening up new possibilities for turning situations round.<sup>57</sup>



**Vulnerability is not confined to women, nor is it universal among women: war tends to bring particularly savage disadvantage to those who are already vulnerable, whether they are male or female. This conclusion lends relevance to an understanding of gender that incorporates intersectionality, and supports the call for a multi-dimensional and relational understanding of gender not exclusively focused on women.**

## CONCLUSION

For conflict analysis to comprehend the breadth and depth of social relations, and in the process to generate more tailored interventions that better comprehend realities, it needs to undergo a paradigm shift towards thinking of conflict and peace as complex, iterative, many-layered, and dynamic processes, thereby opening up opportunities to be enriched by a nuanced understanding of gender relations.

The dominant mode of thinking about gender within international organisations - with WPS both shaped by and helping to shape this - has been, up to now, one-dimensional. It has failed to make much of a dent in mainstream conflict analysis, which continues to be positivist, reductionist, and masculinist, serving the interests of global power structures and the institutions that represent them, and failing to acknowledge the centrality of local actors or to recognise the complex, iterative, many-layered, and dynamic nature of the processes of conflict and peace. Belated attempts at engendering the mainstream approach have extended the paradigm to some extent and have opened up opportunities for women-supportive policy, but have been unable to escape from the narrow confines of the framework, thus limiting the envisioning of creative peacebuilding solutions.



Mainstream conflict analysis continues to be positivist, reductionist, and masculinist, serving the interests of global power structures and the institutions that represent them, and failing to acknowledge the centrality of local actors or to recognise the complex, iterative, many-layered, and dynamic nature of the processes of conflict and peace.

Gender is deeply implicated not only in the immediate impacts of violent conflict but also in the knock-on effects and beyond, including those that facilitate the perpetuation of violence for several generations into the future. Conceptualising both conflict and gender in broad terms, recognising their complexity and fluidity, does make a difference in terms of the richness and accuracy of the picture that analysis is able to paint. Applying a relational and intersectional understanding of gender to conflict analysis permits important insights into its social, psychosocial, and cultural, as well as political and economic, dimensions to be incorporated into peacebuilding strategies and practice.

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