Security Dialogue

http://sdi.sagepub.com/

The online version of this article can be found at:

http://sdi.sagepub.com/content/35/4/429

Additional services and information for *Security Dialogue* can be found at:

Email Alerts: http://sdi.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts

Subscriptions: http://sdi.sagepub.com/subscriptions

Reprints: http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav

Permissions: http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav

Citations: http://sdi.sagepub.com/content/35/4/429.refs.html

Conflict, Gender, Ethnicity and Post-Conflict Reconstruction

LORI HANDRAHAN*

International Centre for Gender Studies, Oxford University, UK & Cuny Center, Washington, DC, USA

This article introduces the concept of ethnicity in relation to gendered security problems in conflict and post-conflict settings. Feminist research has established that men and women experience conflict and post-conflict situations differently owing to issues of identity and power. National and gendered identities and women's disadvantageous location within global and local power structures combine to put women at risk, while simultaneously providing little room for them to voice their security problems. Theories on women as female boundary-makers show how ethnicity appears in part to be created, maintained and socialized through male control of gender identities, and how women's fundamental human rights and dignity are often caught up in male power struggles. In post-conflict settings, gender construction appears to be further complicated by both national agendas of identity formation and re-formation, which often include an ethnic focus, and the presence of a competing 'fraternity' as a consequence of the arrival of the international community.

Keywords gender · security · ethnicity · conflict · fraternity

THE TERM 'POST-CONFLICT' GENERALLY REFERS TO a period when predominately male combatants have ceased to engage in 'official' war.[1] Because conflict is still perceived through male paradigms by both international and national community leaders – by and large men – the 'formal' period of fighting/conflict is what the international development community focuses on.[2] Once such fighting has stopped, a conflict is

---

[1] This research is concerned with state-sponsored violent conflict (both interstate and intrastate), commonly called war, and generalized post-conflict settings of such wars. There is no implication that conflict, peace (making, keeping, negotiating) and post-conflict reconstruction form a linear, progressive spectrum, or even that there are distinct phases within such developments. However, for the sake of examination, three distinct phases have been separated out from what is, operationally, neither distinct nor necessarily progressive.

[2] This research uses the generalized terms 'men' and 'women', but this in no way implies that all or only men/women act in the manners described, just that this generally holds true.

---

perceived to have transitioned beyond conflict. Although the new phase is not without violence, there is no more 'official' conflict. Apart from isolated incidents, the threat of violence is apparently over. Or so the dominant perception has it. A feminist analysis tells otherwise.

While it can take a war for personal security to become an issue in most men's lives, insecurity is all too common for women, irrespective of war.[3] Female insecurity is so prevalent that it becomes invisible and accepted as the norm.[4] Building on a substantial body of feminist literature that has documented, for the past thirty years, the levels of violence committed against women, largely by men, during so-called non-conflict periods in the developing and the developed world, feminists started to ask what happens to women's security during war if such levels of male violence are tolerated during non-conflict periods (Bennett, Bexley & Warnock, 1995; Byrne, 1995; Jacobs, Jacobson & Marchbank, 2000). They found that violence remains a common denominator in women's lives, but that gender identities shift during war, and this, in effect, changes the type and intensity of violence.[5]

Much of the recent feminist work on gender and conflict has focused on ethnic war.[6] This may be owing to outrage provoked when women have been targeted for ethnic rape, particularly in Bosnia and Rwanda. However, this research has not benefited, as it might, from feminist work on ethnic identity.[7] With the exception of Cockburn & Zarkov (2002), little feminist academic work has examined gender in post-conflict environments. Rather, it is feminist practitioners who seem to be producing the defining material on gender and post-conflict, including UNIFEM (Rehn & Sirleaf, 2002),

---

[3] For example, the first world report on violence by the World Health Organization (WHO) documents global crisis-level statistics of male violence against women (Krug et al., 2002). The WHO has previously estimated that, on a global level, one in five women endures male-induced physical and/or sexual violence (Sweetman, 1998: 2). Also, a World Bank study of 31 countries documents that half of all women suffer violence from a current or former male partner (Sweetman, 1998: 2). A study conducted by Johannesburg's Southern Metropolitan Local Council and CIET Africa, a local NGO, reported that one in four men in South Africa claimed to have raped a woman by the age of 18 (Pretorius, 2000). Ninety percent of all people arrested in the USA in 1996 for aggravated assault, murder and manslaughter were men (Connell, 2002: 33). The Feminist Majority reports that, in the USA in 1991, 21,000 cases of male domestic crimes against women were reported *every week,* and the US Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) estimates that four women die every day in the USA as a result of male domestic violence; see http://www.feminist.org/other/dv/dvfact.html (28 December 2003).

[4] For further discussion, see Brownmiller (1975).

[5] See, for example, Elshtain (1987), Enloe (1983, 1989, 2000), Byrne (1995), Moser & Clark (2001), Vickers (1993), among many others. For reviews of the literature on women and conflict, see El Jack (2003), Bouta & Frerks (2002) and Skjelsbaek (2001).

[6] A conflict need not have been 'ethnic' in order to produce ethnic considerations and tensions in the post-conflict phase. Future research might examine whether ethnic wars and non-ethnic wars produce different post-conflict settings as far as gender and ethnicity are concerned. That is beyond the scope of this article. While it is recognized that ethnicity and ethnic conflict are problematic terms, it is also beyond the scope of this study to detail the bulk of research carried out on ethnicity, the nation and nationalism.

[7] For example, Meintjes, Pillay & Tursehn (2001), one of the first works to explore post-conflict and gender issues, does not benefit from the primary ethnic/gender literature, including Cockburn (1998), Yuval-Davis (1997), Yuval-Davis & Anthias (1989), Charles & Hintjens (1998), Barot, Bradley & Fenton (1999), and Reid & Burlet (1998).

International Alert (Mazurana & Piza Lopez, 2002) and the UN's War Torn Societies Project (Sorensen, 1998).[8] Notwithstanding this comprehensive body of work, international development agencies routinely ignore gender and women's issues when designing and implementing post-conflict development programmes.

This article explores the importance of ethnicity in understanding security problems by taking feminist analyses of gender, conflict and ethnicity to the post-conflict setting.[9] The theoretical goal is to merge literature on gender and war and feminist work on ethnicity, establishing a potential framework for analysis of gender and ethnicity in the postwar setting. The first section considers differences in men's and women's security during and after conflict, and argues that women's security is marginalized politically and analytically owing to local and global gender inequality. The second section introduces feminist theories on male honour and women as boundary-makers to explain why and how women are targeted both during and after ethnic conflict. The third section explores policy implications of the previous analysis.

Empirical examples are presented throughout the article to support the claim that women's security problems are distinct from those of men as a result of created gender roles and norms, and in need of theoretical and political attention, as well as to illustrate the ramifications of the theoretical arguments. Empirical data are drawn from the feminist body of literature on gender, violence and war. Gender is a contextual, socially constructed means of assigning roles and norms to given sex categories. Since the dominant gender context is typically patriarchal, or what Connell calls hegemonic masculinity, this has a distinct impact on women's and men's behaviours, experiences and lives (Connell, 1987: 280). Although heterosexual gender variances are of prime concern in this study, homosexual gender dynamics during and after conflict, as well as ethnic creation, remain severely under-studied and demand serious consideration.

---

[8] See also the website of International Alert's Gender and Peacebuilding Programme at http://www. womenbuildingpeace.org for many more publications.

[9] Ethnicity, the nation and nationalism are notoriously difficult to define concisely. I rely on Anderson's (1991: 5) definition of the nation as being not an ideology (e.g. liberalism, fascism), but rather an analytical expression, such as age, kinship, religion. According to Anderson (1991: 5–7), the nation 'is an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. . . . the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship'. Ethnicity is also an 'imagined' community, but one that relies less on formal politics to define the boundaries of community, like the nation, and more on so-called socio-cultural boundary-markers, made famous by Anthony Smith, such as language, homeland, religion, phenotypic characteristics, culture and myth. I also add gender to the boundary-markers (see Handrahan, 2002). Smith's (1992: 438) definition of ethnicity is 'a named human group claiming a home-land and sharing myths of common ancestry, historical memories and a distinct culture'. Ethnicity is often thought to be mobilized by the community, and nationalism by the state. In reality, however, both the state and local leaders shape and mobilize ethnic and national identities for various rationales at different junctures in political processes. The confusion between ethnicity and nationalism, and the concepts and the nexus between them, remain vivid.

Conflict to Post-Conflict and Gender

Fraternities

Benedict Anderson, the well-known academic expert on identity, asserts that it is 'fraternity that makes it possible . . . for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die' for their community (Anderson, 1991: 7). While it is obvious that global conflict is largely perpetuated by varying 'fraternities' of men, the international community has historically failed to acknowledge the role that fraternity, male group identity, plays in relation to violent conflict. Even the most basic analysis of conflict and post-conflict processes reveals significant gender divisions that are so obvious that they end up being largely overlooked – because it is *taken for granted* that it is men who fight, men who lead troops or guerrilla movements, men who negotiate peace, men who wear blue helmets, and men who head UN agencies. Largely, these assumptions hold true.[10] While there are certainly numerous examples of women who fight, kill and lead both peace and development programmes, the involvement of women in leadership roles is noticed *because* it is exceptional (Rehn & Sirleaf, 2002). Because these assumptions about what men do (and what women do not do) are so ingrained in essential ideas of manhood, or masculinity, such activities are seen as normal behaviour – behaviour so mundane that it is 'unseen' and unquestioned. Acknowledging gender divisions provides an opportunity to 'see' fraternity and to ask questions about it. Why would 'so many millions' of men be willing to die? To kill? What is the relevance of fraternity? Why are not millions of sororities willing to kill and die? Indeed, it seems almost inane to attempt to study war and armed conflict *without* considering fraternity and masculinity. Yet, consideration of gender in armed conflict has been primarily left to a few feminists.

   While producing different analyses in relation to *in situ* circumstances, the feminist work that has begun to examine conflict has yielded an important constant: male dominance and issues of power and how these relate to gender identity (Cockburn, 1998: 3). While men suffer tremendously during war, there is nonetheless a positive identity aspect for men who defend 'their' women and homeland. Male participation in conflict represents a necessary component of citizenship, ethnicity and communal belonging. Feminists like Enloe (1983, 1989, 2000), Peterson (1992, 1995), Pateman (1970, 1983), Elshtain (1987, 1992) and Phillips (1991, 1999) have documented the strikingly consis-

---

[10] For example, only 3% of all UN civil operations staff and only 4% of all UN military operations staff are women. In the UN peacekeeping missions to Afghanistan, Burundi, Cambodia, the Golan Heights, Liberia and Tajikistan, there are no women serving. See International Women's Tribunal Centre Fact Sheet on Women and Armed Conflict, available at http://www.iwtc.org/212.html (15 October 2003); see also Goldstein (2001: 10–11), where Goldstein asserts that 97% of the 23 million soldiers serving in today's standing armies are male. In UN peacekeeping forces, women comprise less than 2%.

tent gender elements of citizenship and the 'link between citizenship and the division between women and men that war, and the preparations for war, enforce' (Benton, 1998: 27). Through separation from the household, the fraternity becomes possible (Charles & Hintjens, 1998: 17). In this sense, the 'selfless, communal experience of brotherhood, which is the model of civic virtue' is unsustainable without war (Benton, 1998: 43). War makes the man.

The post-conflict environment, like conflict, is vividly about male power systems, struggles and identity formation (Cockburn & Zarkov, 2002). But, owing to dramatic fluctuations within identity 'norms', 'fraternity' may be manifested in even more complex ways following armed conflict. Those who ruled during the conflict may be losing their grip on power. Resistance groups may be ascending. As power struggles play out, old norms and definitions may cease to apply. It is difficult to know what constitutes 'normal'. The population may be instructed to 'revert' to a former identity that was suppressed under a recent regime, or instructed to 'embrace' a new identity. A new regime may demand a rapid identity transformation in order to justify or solidify its rule. Dramatically shifting identities are accompanied by the very immediate traumas and horrors of conflict that all parties experience, including death, severe injury, rape, abuse, poverty, depression, disease, and loss of home, family, job and sometimes country. The population is expected to cope with a new ordering system imposed in an environment of near-total physical and psychological devastation.

Added to this uncertain identity period is the presence of a competing 'fraternity' that may have filled a male domestic power vacuum created during the conflict.[11] This 'international fraternity' – the community of decisionmakers and experts who arrive after a conflict on a mission of 'good will' – holds the upper hand, morally, economically and politically. Its members are there to 'enforce' UN mandates, international laws and norms. As individuals, they have significantly greater financial power than local people. Morally, they are the 'saviours'. They have been brought in because local males have 'failed'. The model of 'civic virtue' is then also evident within the ranks of the international 'fraternity'. Its members too are separated from their households and are undergoing their own identity fluctuations. The new roles of leadership and positions of authority, for many, provide a heady blend of power that is all too often abused as the fraternity begins, very rapidly, to produce its own models for acceptable norms of behaviour 'in country', which often differ drastically from norms otherwise adhered to 'at home'. The internationals also bring with them varying ideas of gender norms, which they may attempt, consciously or unconsciously, to impose.

All these postwar oscillating identities carry their own notions of gender. The shifting of societal gender roles, and their individual gender accommo-

---

[11] For further discussion, see Cockburn & Zarkov (2002).

dations, are often unconscious and additional to more pressing problems in such a convoluted and painful period. It is easy to perceive the variable gender identities as insignificant in relation to the larger issues of post-conflict reconstruction. However, while gender may be only one concern for women, it is a pivotal one, since women's fundamental human rights and dignity are often caught in the middle of multiple male power struggles played out as identity norms. As Cockburn (1998: 3) states, there is 'one constant in a feminist gender analysis, whoever makes it: the differentiation and relative positioning of women and men is seen as an important ordering principle that pervades the system of power and is sometimes its very embodiment'.

And Sororities

During war men, overwhelmingly, suffer grotesque violence and death. However, Mertus (2000), Lindsey (2001), Moser & Clark (2001), Jacobs, Jacobson & Marchbank (2000), Bennett, Bexley & Warnock (1995) and Rehn & Sirleaf (2002) have documented the horrendous violence endured by women as 'non-combatants' during conflict. Rehn, a former defence minister, and Sirleaf, one of only four ministers to escape Liberia alive, comment at the outset of their global report on women and war, 'how little prepared we were for the enormity of it all: the staggering numbers of women in war who survive the brutality of rape, sexual exploitation, mutilation, torture and displacement. The unconscionable acts of depravity' (Rehn & Sirleaf, 2002: vii). And yet, for women, more so than for men, the post-conflict period may pose as much, if not more, of a threat than 'formal' conflict. After a conflict, it is more likely for trafficking in woman to be established and consolidated; for women to be forced, through economic necessity, 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. Gender, defined differently by each competing patriarchal power, is situated at the centre of the crisis in an environment that the international community has termed 'post-conflict'. Beyond conflict? Not for women (Meintjes, Pillay & Tursehn, 2001).

Reintegration into a domestic setting after warfare is a difficult proposition for both men and women. For women whose male relatives survive the war, domestic violence tends to increase when male combatants return home.[12] Women and female leaders who have managed homes and/or the com-

---

[12] The Miles Foundation, a non-profit research and advocacy group on domestic abuse by military personnel, cites estimates suggesting that military domestic violence rose 'from 18.6 per 1000 in 1990 to 25.6 per 1000 in 1996'. Victims were predominantly female, civilian spouses of active duty personnel; see http://members.aol.com/_ht_a/milesfdn/myhomepage (13 October 2003); see also Cockburn (1998: 128).

munity during the absence of the males may experience conflicting emotions as their decisionmaking and authority become secondary to those of the returning men. Men may be shocked at how 'empowered' the women have become as a result of the war. Excessive care and attention heaped on the male solider as a returning 'hero' may create internal pressures for him to live up to a standard of glory incongruent with the horrors he has witnessed and/or committed. Regardless of what a female non-combatant may have survived and whatever heroic acts of courage she may have committed, a woman is expected to devote her attention to the returning male 'war hero', and there is a tendency to minimize, if not outright deny, her war experience. The woman was not a fighter, and hence is not a hero. She can expect little comfort or recognition after the war. That there are few, if any, reorientation trauma programmes for both combatants and non-combatants increases the likelihood of violent domestic tensions during reintegration.

Women are expected to serve their communities/countries not by fighting as a solider, but by 'preserving' their sexual purity for the 'honour' of their male relatives. This is why women who have been raped are sometimes shamed by their relatives into committing suicide to maintain the 'honour' of their men (Coomaraswamy, 1999: 12). Women can also be killed by their male relatives to 'restore honour'. Feminists have documented that violence against women during war is very often sexualized; however, if women survive sexual violence, this is an issue they can never discuss or admit without bringing harm and shame both to their surviving male relatives and to themselves. If such episodes are disclosed, women are not considered brave for having survived rape, but rather disgraced for having 'submitted' to contamination by an enemy male. Thus, while a man returning from combat can receive care for his non-sexual war wounds and injuries, a woman cannot display her war wounds or receive necessary medical care as these are most often sexual. The international community operating in post-conflict situations provides little creative programming to meet this need.

For women whose male relatives do not return, widowhood can represent not only the deep emotional loss of a loved one, but also a significant lowering of status within patriarchal society, since the identity of a woman has no individual value but is related to her position as 'someone's woman'. When she is no longer linked with a man, this affects both her social acceptability within the community and her economic security. While the status of women, *jus cogens*, in all societies is less than equal to that of men under the best of circumstances, female vulnerability and insecurity are heightened in the post-conflict setting. Returning soldiers will be given jobs first – they need to 'provide' for their families and have 'served their country' – while widows will be given second priority.

Insecurity for women in the post-conflict environment is not, unfortunately, created only by the national male population. Sexual abuse of women

by the international fraternity is also often present. From Bosnia to Eritrea, from Cambodia to West Africa, there are numerous reports of violence and sexual exploitation of women and children by male UN peacekeepers and other international community representatives (United Nations, 2002; Rehn & Sirleaf, 2002; UNHCR, 2002; United States Congressional Document, 2002; Rees, 2002). This behaviour represents a form of sexual dominance over the local men, a fundamental abuse of power and a violation of human rights standards, creating anger and resentment towards the international community.[13] Even international males who are not abusive are often reluctant to speak out against male colleagues who are involved in abusive, illegal behaviour. This well-known phenomenon was described as a 'conspiracy of silence' in a report by UNHCR and Save the Children UK on sexual violence and exploitation by international personnel of women and children under their care in West Africa (UNHCR, 2002).

War tends to break down patriarchal structures, and women gain, as an unintended consequence, freedom, responsibility and worth. This gender liberation appears short-lived, as the national patriarchy begins to reassert itself after the war and expects women to return to 'the way they were before the war', that is, to their subordinate positions. What has not yet been explored – with the partial exception of Cockburn & Zarkov's (2002) edited volume – is the possibility that the loosening of rigid and patriarchal gender schemas is closed not by the national male leadership, but by the male international development community, whose own sense of patriarchy-as-normal is quite intact (Bennett, Bexley & Warnock, 1995). This may be evident in the aggressive refusal by the international development community, as a whole, to seriously consider gender issues in post-conflict reconstruction (Bouta & Frerks, 2002). The lack of 'gender mainstreaming' seems *not* to result from an inability on the part of the international community to know better (Rees, 2002), but rather suggests its *inability* to consider *its own* patriarchy and the damage this does within international development paradigms.

Ethnicity and Violence: Male Honour and Female Boundary-Markers

In the late 1990s, some feminist researchers began to argue that ethnicity appears to be created and maintained, in part, through the use of gender identities. This research assists in explaining the importance of ethnicity in

---

[13] For further discussion, see the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom's bibliography of crimes against women committed by UN peacekeeping staff or UN staff, available at http://www.peacewomen.org/un/pkwatch/bib.html (13 October 2003).

the targeting of women both during and after war. Sexual violence by men against women during war is notorious (Coomaraswamy, 1999: 6). Male combatants have been known to tattoo their insignia on female breasts or genitalia, puncture wombs with guns, force rifles into vaginas, rip foetuses from wombs, purposely infect women with HIV, and carry out acts of rape, gang rape and rape with forced gestation (Coomaraswamy, 1999: 7–10; Bennett, Bexley & Warnock, 1995: 115; Rehn & Sirleaf, 2002: 9–10; Padarath, 1998: 68). Such acts are not 'just' symptomatic of war but represent a *strategy of war*. Specifically, like 'Kilroy was here', they represent expansion of ethnic territory by the male conqueror.

If ethnicity is patriarchal, male honour and national identity are located within the female, as women's bodies are used as 'vehicles' for the symbolic depiction of political purpose (Yuval-Davis, 1997; Elshtain, 1992; Moghadam, 1997; Coomaraswamy, 1999). The reproductive and sexual capacities of the female body then become significant markers of male-defined ethnic identity. 'If women are strictly controlled and only permitted to express sexuality with men of their own community then it is apparent that the community lays great emphasis on ethnic purity. During war that purity is deliberately assaulted precisely because it strikes at the core of ethnic identity' (Coomaraswamy, 1999: 18). Women assume a role of ethnic depiction and are therefore an important target during ethnic conflict. Gender inequality renders this female target vulnerable.[14] The female is passive and vulnerable, creating a 'dependency' on male definitions of 'appropriate' behaviour, as well as on male 'protection' (Yuval-Davis & Anthias, 1989). Male ethnic violence, then, is directed inward towards 'their women' and outward onto 'other's women', in order to restrict and control 'their' ethnicity and to intimidate and contaminate the ethnic 'other', respectively (Handrahan, 2002, 2004a).

While there is extensive documentation that women's 'bodies became a battleground over which opposing forces struggle' (Rehn & Sirleaf, 2002: 10), there has been little analysis of how patriarchal manifested forms of ethnicity form the core of this behaviour.[15] When ethnicity is considered paternal, or masculine, this renders the woman's ethnicity irrelevant. In Bosnia (1993–94), non-Serb women were raped by Serbian male soldiers, held until gestation and believed to 'produce' Serb children (Coomaraswamy, 1999: 6). In Rwanda, 'the former Rwandan army and the RPF rounded up young women and kept them as incubators of a new generation . . . men on both sides believed that their military and political power was linked to their numbers,

---

[14] Another feminist approach focuses on the ethnic myth of creation, and women as cultural symbols of ethnic worlds (Coomaraswamy, 1999; Charles & Hintjens, 1998; Benton, 1998). Space constraints prevent further discussion of this approach.

[15] For further discussion, see Bennett, Bexley & Warnock (1995), a collection of two hundred testimonies of female survivors of war in 12 different countries.

the ethnicity of the women captives was irrelevant' (Twagiramariya & Turshen, 1998: 104). In India, during the partition, there are similar testimonies regarding the lack of female ethnic identity, the *invisibility* and irrelevance of a woman's identity, as children of Hindu women raped by Muslims were not 'allowed to survive' because they were considered Muslim (Bennett, Bexley & Warnock, 1995: 115). Because of the patriarchy of ethnicity, a man can produce children that are ethnically *his* by raping any woman, regardless of the latter's ethnic distinction, because, in fact, she possesses no separate identity, neither individually nor collectively. Rather, she is a boundary-marker for male-defined collective ethnic identity, and only enjoys her ethnicity as long as she remains inside and adheres to the 'boundaries' of ethnicity as assessed by male ethnic leaders.

Once a woman has 'allowed' penetration by the ethnic 'other,' she may be rejected, because she is ethnically contaminated and hence no longer of value to her community. Suicide by women to 'save' the ethnic honour of the community is not uncommon. 'Those who did not commit suicide feel that the community has concluded that they gave into sexual violence to save their lives, that they did not have a sense of honour to take their own lives' (Coomaraswamy, 1999: 12). Women, then, do not have inherent worth. Instead, their valued is directly linked to their ability and/or choice to remain monogamous to their ethnic community. This is not limited to 'relationships with enemy males', but also extends to women who conduct sexual relations with 'other' men, including men from the international community. Those women, left behind when the international community withdraws, often suffer the same rejection as women who have been raped by enemy men.

Women are victims and perpetrators in all systems of male violence. Conflict and post-conflict settings are no exceptions. 'The complicity of women with regard to the violence of their men . . . is a very disturbing phenomenon', but not surprising considering what Kandiyoti (1988) calls 'the patriarchal bargain'. The dominating framework in which women assist and enforce the communities' rituals – from female genital mutilation to bride-burning and bride-kidnapping – is patriarchy. In such systems, women have no inherent value and the 'identities available to women are constructed within specific power relations which provide the framework of choice' (Yuval-Davis, 1997: 21). This is a male-controlled framework, and women who do not want to be rejected from the ethnicity/community tend to comply. When women are allowed or encouraged to participate, it is male leaders who are controlling and creating the conflict within which women are given a 'temporary' place. This 'temporary' place is usually manifested in the form of revolutionary action and then rescinded during post-conflict consolidation and an attempt to 'return to normal' (Bennett, Bexley & Warnock, 1995).

Women who choose not to solve their problems through reifying male ethnicity and violence often choose to reject, outright, male control and to form multi-ethnic/national/racial 'peace groups' with other women. The shared experiences that women have as women, mothers and wives subjected to violence may be what reduces the significance of ethnicity and strengthens gender identity. These alternative female gender-based alliances can be found in conflict/post-conflict settings around the globe, from the International Conference on Women at the Hague in 1915 to Women in Pink against the Iraq War in 2003, from the twenty thousand women who marched in Colombia in the National Movement of Women Against the War to the Mano River Union Women's Network for Peace in Africa (Rehn & Sirleaf, 2002: 77–78). Indeed, it is difficult to find a war where women's groups have not braved ethnic terror and national militaries to march, demonstrate and demand peace.

Cynthia Cockburn's (1998) landmark study profiled three prominent examples. In Northern Ireland, Israel/Palestine and Bosnia, women worked and continue to work together, across violent ethnic boundaries, rejecting male-defined ethnic identities linked to violence and favouring, instead, a predominant female gender identity linked to peacebuilding. The rationale for women coming together across ethnic lines was that 'if a militarised society was a disaster both to the women of the oppressing community as well as the community of the oppressed, an alliance between women would help both groups' (Cockburn, 1998: 128). The catalyst for rejecting ethnic/national identity in favour of gender in all three of Cockburn's case histories, no matter the country or culture, occurred when women defined *themselves* and gained (or regained) control of their own reproductive potential and sexuality (Yuval-Davis & Anthias, 1989; Charles & Hintjens, 1998: 6). By so doing, women rejected the inter-/intra-ethnic violence directed against them and rejected their position as 'ethnic boundary-markers'. Women are more vulnerable to possession by the ethnic (other and own) male when they lack possession of their own, female, identity.

Similar experiences have been documented around the world, from Uganda, Somalia and Rwanda (El-Bushra, 2000: 68–75) to Lebanon, Colombia, Nicaragua, Liberia, Somaliland and Sri Lanka (Bennett, Bexley & Warnock, 1995: 21, 31–40, 56, 150, 227), to women active in the Black Sash in South Africa, where 'white women joined hands with black women' (Padarath, 1998: 67) and the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo in Argentina, where the women used their female gender as 'the pivotal point of their protests . . . used their gender to stand up publicly to the military' (Fagan, 2000: 209). So prevalent are multi-ethnic female associations within peace movements that, in reviewing the literature on women, conflict and peace, I have yet to find a source that does not mention the predominance of women, coming together *qua women*, against war. In striking contrast, although there are many men who want peace and

who participate in and lead anti-war efforts, there are very few male *qua* male peace groups, marches or movements.

Owing to the predominance of women, and not men, rejecting ethnicity as primary and uniting across contested ethnic lines under the auspices of assumed primary gender identities, there has been some speculation that perhaps women are 'natural' peacemakers. My research posits instead that if women's ethnicity is instrumentalized by male ethnic leaders, as appears to be the case, women may be less attached to an identity that locates them at the nexus of inter- and intra-male violence. When women favour gender as a primary identity, they may be asserting their rights as women, independent of the dominant male ethnic community and identity. Women who claim an individual, rights-based identity, separate from male control, can also be rejected from the community, like those that have been 'contaminated' by enemy male 'others', because their gender-based alliances threaten the status quo of patriarchy. Since there are repercussions for rejecting group identity, it is only logical that women in search of greater autonomy would seek out women from other ethnic groups who are also attempting to break from patriarchal imposed ethnicity.

Implications for Post-Conflict Policy

Because gender is often seen as trivial by many in leadership positions within the international community, key elements of postwar reconstruction are neglected. For example, regardless of what a female non-combatant may have endured, there is a tendency to minimize, if not outright deny, her experience. This means that women are not receiving necessary comfort and care for their wartime wounds, particularly if these are sexual (as they most often are). Widows suffer greatly in the post-conflict environment and need to be given special consideration, not second priority. Reorientation programmes designed to deal with trauma for male combatants need to include domestic violence prevention and therapy for sexual violence that men suffer during conflict so this is not revisited on women and children (Zarkov, 2000: 69–82).

It is rarely considered that encouraging a return to what is considered 'normal' after a conflict may reflect the patriarchal order before the conflict, where women's rights might have been routinely violated. Or that the international community's definition of 'normal' tolerates high levels of violence against women in their own societies (Krug et al., 2002). Not surprisingly, women rarely want to return to either national or international standards of what is 'normal'. The international community engaged in post-conflict work needs to recognize that 'cultural sensitivity' does not mean supporting

systems of violence, oppression and gender inequality even if these are 'couched' as a prevailing ethnic identity.

Women, who may have held the family, community and country together during a war, are all too often left out of post-conflict developmental plans and decisions by both international and national male leaders, and told to return to their 'normal' activities, those of the private citizen largely concerned with domestic life. Little wonder, then, that great resentment and frustration exists among women pushed aside, by nationals and internationals alike, as non-essential partners in post-conflict reconstruction (Rehn & Sirleaf, 2002; Bouta & Frerks, 2002; Cockburn & Zarkov, 2002; Bennett, Bexley & Warnock, 1995). This utter failure of the international development community to consider women, because of its own patriarchal constraints and norms, has been particularly strikingly in Bosnia, Kosovo and Afghanistan (Abdela, 2000; Lindsey, 2001; Verdirame, 2001; Mertus, 2000; Cockburn & Zarkov, 2002).

A juxtaposition of the overwhelming numbers of women involved in grassroots peace movements worldwide with the parsimonious financial support and credibility allocated by the international development community to these women is stunning. Rehn & Sirleaf exhaustively examined nearly all of the key actors involved in post-conflict reconstruction. They claim that not one 'single transition plan' meets even the most basic requirements of gender mainstreaming: 'The World Bank Reconstruction and Development Programme in Bosnia and Herzegovina has no gender analysis and mentions women only once in a micro-credit section. The World Bank Group Transitional Support Strategy for Kosovo does not mention gender or women at all. Nor did the UN's Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) Consolidated Budget for 2001, except for one gender-training project costing $31,000 or approximately .006 per cent of the total budget of $467 million. In East Timor's draft national budget, the Office of Equity was given only 6 permanent staff out of a total of nearly 15,000 civil servants and a budget of less than half of one per cent – to $38,000 – of a total budget of approximately $77million' (Rehn & Sirleaf, 2002: 124–125). Bouta & Frerks's (2002) equally comprehensive study reaches similar conclusions, as does my own research (Handrahan, 2004b).

Given this context, it is no wonder that the implications of gender and ethnicity on conflict, peace and the post-conflict environment have yet to be thoroughly examined. With so little research on and operational funding available for gender and women in conflict/post-conflict settings, one has to conclude that we, the international community, engaged in trying to 'prevent conflict' and 'promote peace', actually know very little about either. The international development community must begin to grapple with its own patriarchal blinders. Substantial support must be given to community-based women's rights programmes and institutional research agendas examining the impact of women, gender ethnicity, conflict and peace. Such efforts

would be greatly aided if the international development community, within its own organizations, hired, promoted and paid women in parity with their male colleagues.

Conclusion

Solutions to the terror that people experience during and after conflict have roots in the under-explored linkages among gender, ethnicity, patriarchy and conflict. This article has shown that the relationships of ethnicity to gender and conflict are worth examination, because a gender analysis of ethnicity problematizes the complexities of social realities, concepts of community, and understandings of conflict and post-conflict dynamics. Elements of gender and identity appear to be both valuable tools for preventing violence in post-conflict reconstruction and an excuse for promoting and prolonging violence. Indeed, gender identity, expectations and norms appear to be at the very root of what constitutes and creates security and insecurity for both women and men.

Better understandings of the dynamics of gender and ethnicity in post-conflict settings have been limited by the international development community's refusal to incorporate gender issues at any more than a rhetorical level, and then barely that. While three decades of feminist research have made most international development professionals aware that women 'should' be considered, few understand *why* and *what* rigorous consideration of women – better still, gender – does to the 'known' paradigms. Without consideration of gender, security is an empty concept. The implications of gendering ethnicity, coupled with emerging research on gender and conflict, constitute an urgent research agenda for both the feminist project and the international development community to consider, particularly in post-conflict settings, if more 'secure' environments are the desired outcome.

* Lori M. Handrahan, PhD, is a Research Fellow at the Cuny Center and is currently writing her second book, *Gender: Ethnic War and Modern Peace*, to be published by Lynne Rienner in 2004. She can be reached at L.M.Handrahan-alumni@lse.ac.uk. The author would like to express her thanks, as always, to Lou Ivey, and to Cynthia Cockburn, Denize Kandiyoti and Anne Phillips for their excellent work that informs and challenges her own.

References

Abdela, Lesley, 2000. 'Kosovo: Missed Opportunities, Lessons for the Future'; available at http://www.abdela.co.uk/Information/Kosovo/kosovo_section.html (13 October 2003).

Anderson, Benedict, 1991. *Spread of Nationalism.* London: Verso.

Barot, Rohit; Harriet Bradley & Steve Fenton, eds, 1999. *Ethnicity, Gender, and Social Change.* London: Macmillan.

Bennett, Olivia; Joe Bexley & Kitty Warnock, eds, 1995. *Arms To Fight, Arms To Protect: Women Speak Out About Conflict.* London: Panos.

Benton, Sarah, 1998. 'Founding Fathers and Earth Mothers: Women's Place at the "Birth" of Nations', in Charles Nickie & Helen Hintjens, eds, *Gender, Ethnicity and Political Ideologies.* London: Routledge (27–45).

Bouta, Tsjeard & Georg Frerks, 2002. *Women's Roles in Conflict, Prevention, Conflict Resolution and Post-Conflict Reconstruction: Literature Review and Institutional Analysis.* The Hague: Netherlands Institute of International Relations, Clingendael; available at http://www.clingendael.nl/cru/publications/publications_occ_papers.htm (4 December 2003).

Brownmiller, Susan, 1975. *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape.* New York: Bantam.

Byrne, Bridget, 1995. *Gender, Conflict and Development,* Research Report 1(34). Brighton: Institute for Development Studies.

Byrne, Bridget; Rachel Marcus & Tanya Powers-Stevens, 1996. *Gender, Conflict and Development,* Research Report 2(35). Brighton: Institute for Development Studies.

Charles, Nickie & Helen Hintjens, eds, 1998. *Gender, Ethnicity and Political Ideologies.* London: Routledge.

Cockburn, Cynthia, 1998. *The Space Between Us: Negotiating Gender and National Identities in Conflict.* London: Zed.

Cockburn, Cynthia & Dubravka Zarkov, eds, 2002. *The Post-War Moment: Militaries, Masculinities and International Peacekeeping.* London: Lawrence & Wishart.

Connell, Robert, 1987. *Gender and Power: Society, the Person, and Sexual Politics.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Connell, Robert, 2002. 'Masculinities, the Reduction of Violence and the Pursuit of Peace', in Cynthia Cockburn & Dubravka Zarkov, eds, *The Post-War Moment: Militaries, Masculinities and International Peacekeeping.* London: Lawrence & Wishart (33–50).

Coomaraswamy, Radhika, 1999. 'A Question of Honour: Women, Ethnicity, and Armed Conflict', Third Minority Rights Lecture, International Centre for Ethnic Studies, Colombo, Sri Lanka; available at http://www.sacw.net/Wmov/RCoomaraswamy OnHonour.html (accessed 22 September 2004).

El-Bushra, Judy, 2000. 'Transforming Conflict: Some Thoughts on a Gendered Understanding of Conflict Process', in Susie Jacobs, Ruth Jacobson & Jennifer Marchbank, eds, *States of Conflict: Gender, Violence, and Resistance.* London: Zed (68–75).

El Jack, Amani, 2003. *Gender and Armed Conflict,* Research Report. Brighton: Institute of Development Studies.

Elshtain, Jean B., 1987. *Women and War.* New York: Basic.

Elshtain, Jean B., 1992. 'Sovereignty, Identity, Sacrifice', in V. Spike Peterson, ed., *Gendered States: Feminist (Re)Visions of International Relations Theory.* Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner (141–176).

Enloe, Cynthia, 1983. *Does Khaki Become You? The Militarization of Women's Lives.* Boston, MA: South End Press.

Enloe, Cynthia, 1989. *Bananas, Beaches, and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics.* Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Enloe, Cynthia, 2000. *Manoeuvres: The International Politics of Militarizing Women's Lives*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Fagan, Honor, 2000. 'Women, War and Peace: Engendering Conflict in Post-Structuralist Perspective', in Ronaldo Munck & Purnaka de Silva, eds, *Post-Modern Insurgencies: Political Violence, Identity Formation and Peacemaking in Comparative Perspective*. London: Macmillan (201–216).

Goldstein, Joshua, 2001. *War and Gender*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Handrahan, Lori, 2002. *Gendering Ethnicity: Implications for Democracy Assistance.* New York: Routledge.

Handrahan, Lori, 2004a. 'Hunting for Women: Bride-Kidnapping in Kyrgyzstan', *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 6(1): 207–33.

Handrahan, Lori, 2004b. 'Rhetoric and Reality: Post-Conflict Recovery & Development – The United Nations & Gender Reform', in Nigel White, ed., *Human Rights and the United Nations*, Manchester University Press.

Jacobs, Susie; Ruth Jacobson & Jennifer Marchbank, eds, 2000. *States of Conflict: Gender, Violence, and Resistance.* London: Zed.

Kandiyoti, Denize, 1988. 'Bargaining with Patriarchy', *Gender and Society* 2(3): 274–290.

Krug, Etienne G.; Linda L. Dahlberg, James A. Mercy, Anthony B. Zwi & Rafael Lozano, eds, 2002. *World Report on Violence and Health.* Geneva: World Health Organization; available at http://www5.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/main.cfm?p=0000000682 (13 October 2003).

Lindsey, Charlotte, 2001. *Women Facing War.* Geneva: International Committee of the Red Cross.

Mazurana, Dyan & Eugenia Piza Lopez, 2002. *Gender Mainstreaming in Peace Support Operations: Moving Beyond Rhetoric to Practice.* London: International Alert.

Meintjes, Sheila; Anu Pillay & Meredith Turshen, 2001. *The Aftermath: Women in Post-Conflict Transformation*. London: Zed.

Mertus, Julie, 2000. *War's Offensive on Women: The Humanitarian Challenge in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Afghanistan.* Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian.

Moghadam, V. M., 1997. 'Nationalist Agendas and Women's Rights Conflicts in Afghanistan in the Twentieth Century', in Lois A. West, ed., *Feminist Nationalism.* New York: Routledge (75–99).

Moser, Caroline & Fiona Clark, eds, 2001. *Victims, Perpetrators or Actors? Gender, Armed Conflict and Political Violence.* London: Zed.

Mueller, John, 2000. 'The Banality of "Ethnic War"', *International Security* 25(1): 42–70.

Padarath, Ashnie, 1998. 'Women and Violence in KwaZulu/Natal', in Meredeth Turshen & Clotilde Twagiramariya, eds, *What Women Do in Wartime: Gender and Conflict in Africa.* London: Zed (62–72).

Pateman, Carol, 1970. *Participation and Democratic Theory.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Pateman, Carol, 1983. 'Feminism and Democracy', in Graeme Duncan, ed., *Democratic Theory and Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Peterson, V. Spike, 1992. 'Security and Sovereign States: What Is at Stake in Taking Feminism Seriously?', in V. Spike Peterson, ed., *Gendered States: Feminist (Re)Visions of International Relations Theory.* Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner (31–64).

Peterson, V. Spike, 1995. 'The Politics of Identity and Gendered Nationalism', in Laura Neack & Patrick J. Haney, eds, *Foreign Policy Analysis: Continuity and Change in Its Second Generation*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Phillips, Anne, 1991. *Engendering Democracy.* University Park, PA: Penn State University Press.

Phillips, Anne, 1999. *Which Equalities Matter?* Oxford: Polity.

Pretorius, Cornia, 2000. 'One in Four Men Say They Are Rapists', *South Africa Sunday Times National,* 25 June; available at http://www.suntimes.co.za/2000/06/25/news/news08.htm (13 October 2003).

Rees, Madeleine, 2002. 'International Intervention in Bosnia-Herzegovina: The Cost of Ignoring Gender', in Cynthia Cockburn & Dubravka Zarkov, eds, *The Post-War Moment: Militaries, Masculinities and International Peacekeeping*. London: Lawrence & Wishart (51–67).

Rehn, Elisabeth & Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, 2002. *Women, War, and Peace: The Independent Experts' Assessment on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Women and Women's Role in Peace-Building*. New York: UNIFEM.

Reid, Helen & Stacey Burlet, 1998. 'A Gendered Uprising: Political Representation and Minority Ethnic Communities', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 21(2): 217–285.

Skjelsbaek, Inger, 2001. 'Sexual Violence and War: Mapping Out a Complex Relationship', *European Journal of International Relations* 7(2): 211–237.

Skjelsbaek, Inger & Dan Smith, eds, 2001. *Gender, Peace & Conflict*. London: Sage.

Smith, Anthony, 1992. 'Chosen Peoples: Why Ethnic Groups Survive', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 15(3): 436–453.

Sorensen, Birgitte, 1998. *Women and Post-Conflict Reconstruction*, War Torn Societies Project Occasional Paper No. 3. Geneva: United Nations Research Institute for Social Development and Programme for Strategic and International Security Studies.

Sweetman, Caroline, 1998. 'Editorial', *Oxfam's Gender and Development Journal* 6(3): 2–6.

Twagiramariya, Clotilde & Meredeth Turshen, 1998. '"Favours" To Give and "Consenting" Victims: The Sexual Politics of Survival in Rwanda', in Meredeth Turshen & Clotilde Twagiramariya, eds, *What Women Do in Wartime: Gender and Conflict in Africa*. London: Zed (101–117).

United Nations, 2002. 'Investigation into Sexual Exploitation of Refugees by Aid Workers in West Africa', Document A/57/465, Agenda Item 22, Fifty-Seventh Session, Report of the Secretary-General on the Activities of the Office of Internal Oversight Services, 11 October; available at http://www.reliefweb.int/library/documents/2002/oios-westafrica-11oct.pdf (13 October 2003).

UNHCR, 2002. *UNHCR and Save the Children/UK on Sexual Violence & Exploitation: The Experience of Refugee Children in Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone*. UNHCR: Geneva; available at http://www.unhcr.ch/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home/opendoc.pdf?id=3c7cf89a4&tbl=PARTNERS (13 October 2003).

United States Congressional Document, 2002. 'The UN and the Sex Slave Trade in Bosnia: Isolated Case or Larger Problem in the UN System?', Hearing Before the Subcommittee on International Operations and Human Rights of the Committee on International Relations, US House of Representatives, 107th US Congress, 24 April, Serial No. 107–85; available at http://www.house.gov/international_relations (3 December 2003).

Verdirame, Guglielmo, 2001. 'Testing the Effectiveness of International Norms: UN Humanitarian Assistance and Sexual Apartheid in Afghanistan', *Human Rights Quarterly* 23: 733–768.

Vickers, Jeanne, 1993. *Women and War*. London: Zed.

Yuval-Davis, Nira, 1997. *Gender and Nation*. London: Sage.

Yuval-Davis, Nira & Floya Anthias, eds, 1989. *Women–Nation–State*. New York: St. Martin's.

Zarkov, Dubravka, 2000. 'The Body of the Other Man: Sexual Violence and the Construction of Masculinity, Sexuality, and Ethnicity in Croatian Media', in Susie Jacobs, Ruth Jacobson & Jennifer Marchbank, eds, *States of Conflict: Gender, Violence, and Resistance*. London: Zed (69–82).