Gender in Pre-Conflict, Conflict and Post-Conflict Dilemma

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Abstract: This paper introduces the concept of gender in relation to gendered security problems in a continuing cycle of pre-conflict, conflict, and post-conflict settings. Feminist research has established that power dynamics often result in women's security problems being distinct from those of men in conflict and post-conflict situations. This differential impact, coupled with the short-term/long-term impact of gender-determined conflict, puts women at risk, while at the same time providing them with little room to resolve safety issues.

Weak systems, discrimination, inequality, injustice, and social tension are components and inevitable results of war. Frankly, this combination places women during conflict in a very vulnerable position-And how women experience conflict is influenced by this vulnerability. Having said that, it becomes easy to identify how women's conflict experience is an outcome of how they are socially identified and treated as members of social groups (Enloe 1998; MacKinnon 2013). Ultimately, the experience of women is multi-faceted, and a few questions impose themselves: What is the differential impact? Why? And what can be done about it?

Pre-conflict:

Unfortunately, a lot of people fail to recognize that gender equality is a crucial aspect of achieving sustainable peace as research has found strong evidence that gender inequality increases the likelihood that a state will have internal conflict (Herbert, 2014). That being said, women are still a long way from gender equality... Compared with men, women have fewer political and economic resources, including but not limited to land, jobs, and conventional positions of power. Hence why, it is particularly necessary to recognize and incorporate these gender differences into policies and studies, both from a human rights standpoint and to optimize impact and socio-economic growth. Understanding that men and women encounter distress differently and face diverse hurdles when it comes to accessing services, economic resources, and political representation is a fundamental step that helps to target interventions.

During conflict:

As a starting point, it is important to point out how conflict is not gender-neutral, and how/why conflict affects different genders differently; 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 (Handrahan, 2004).

Women are expected to serve their communities/countries not by fighting as a soldier, but by 'preserving' their sexual purity for the 'honor' of their male relatives. This is why women directly experience numerous impacts during conflict, many related to sexual violence, including unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases, and community stigma. The consequences of rape and sexual violence in these contexts other than death are often extreme and long-term. Such acts are not just symptomatic of war', but actually represent a strategy of war (Handrahan, 2004).

When analyzing the reasons for a conflict, the question of the continuum of the pre-war situation arises; It's important to point out that war only exacerbates pre-existing inequalities and turns women into disposable bodies and weapons that can be used to destroy communities. Feminist scholars have reported that much of the violence that women have to endure during war is most much sexualized; however, if a woman were to 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.

When such episodes are disclosed, women are not considered heroic for having survived rape, but rather dishonored and blamed for things that are beyond their control. Thus, while a man returning from battle can seek care for his non-sexual wounds and injuries, a woman cannot show her wounds of war nor receive the proper medical care since the wounds are most often sexual. With this in mind, any peace-building efforts will be ineffective unless top-down and bottom-up approaches to healing the wounds of gendered violence against women are prioritized.

Post-conflict:

Sexism in post-conflict (disaster recovery) is so blain, but it goes so unnoticed by so many people because it is left out of the conversation so often. After conflict, Violence against women in communities, homes, and private spaces may persist or even escalate as a direct result of the lack of security and the perception of impunity associated with war crimes. Worst still, the focus remains on boys' war experiences rather than girls', even though sexual and gender-based violence remains the most widespread and serious protection problems facing displaced and returnee women and girls.

Of course, in many post-war contexts, the possibilities of disclosing violence may increase, thus making the layers of violence and harm faced by women in both conflict and post-conflict settings more noticeable. However, women who have held the family, the community, and the country together during the war, are all too often left out of the post-conflict reconstruction and action plans put by both foreign and national male

leaders, as the latter expect them to return normally to 'the way they were before the war', that is, to their subordinate positions.

For the most part, most women survivors are treated very poorly, addressing the inequalities that women had to endure pre-conflict is a rare thing, core aspects of post-war rehabilitation are forgotten, violence against women is aggravated by the culture of impunity, and most women are yet to be considered as a part of any effort to restore peace. For example, whatever a non-combatant woman may have experienced, there is a propensity to underestimate, if not ignore and outright deny her experience. This makes it double the crime and double the suffering as women continue to suffer greatly in the post-conflict environment and culture of impunity by always being considered a second priority.

Conclusion:

From my standpoint, women are victims and perpetrators in all systems of male violence: pre-conflict, conflict, and post-conflict settings are no exceptions. Even so, women need to start pushing for a more influential role in society, as they should get more involved in peace-making. By all counts, and with credible studies, it has been proven that addressing gender inequality could contribute to more stable societies as equal representation leads to more participatory and representative political decisions. Evidence indicates that women participants in peace processes typically focus less on the spoils of war and more on reconstruction, sustainable growth, education, and transitional justice. This, in essence, results in a more harmonious community and creates a solid basis for the establishment of sustainable peace.

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