

Systematic study of gender, conflict, and peace¹

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If you want something said, ask a man. If you want something done, ask a woman.

Margaret Thatcher

1.0. Introduction

In a world increasingly concerned with gender equality, one might wonder why it is appropriate to begin a lecture with quote from a conservative and controversial female political leader. Yet, if you are an ambitious girl dreaming of becoming a general in the 1980s, a non-existent option at the time, there were very few female role models to aspire to; especially women who made it on their own without being sisters or daughters of well-known and connected men. For women interested in questions of society, politics and social institutions, female role models were few and far between.

When I first attended the Annual Meeting of Peace Science Society (International) in Indianapolis in 1997, the field of conflict and peace studies was very much shaped by the original ‘fathers’ (Boulding 1990; Galtung 1969; Rapaport et al. 1965; Richardson 1960). Sadly, there were few founding ‘mothers’. But within the last twenty years a plethora of female scholars has shaped the research agenda in the systematic study of conflict and peace such as Autesserre, Bakke Cunningham, Cohen, Fortna, Kadera, Leeds, Mitchell, Thomas, and Walter among others.¹ Not many of these female academics study questions of gender in security studies as such, but the quick rise of women researchers in all levels of academia has led to important contribution to research areas such as civil wars, rebel groups, terrorism, implementation of peace agreements, conflict fragmentation, conflict management, peacekeeping, horizontal inequalities and violent armed conflict, alliances, regional agreements and organizations, as well as the creation of new data sets. Among the expansion of research topics in conflict and peace studies, the systematic study of gender, conflict, and peace emerged as one of the most significant research frontiers.

Yet, as I will aim to show in the remainder of this article, a focus on gender in relation to conflict was initially controversial. The ‘gender question’ was not part of mainstream security studies research, but rather the domain of feminist research. Ironically, the emphasis of some feminist research on women as victims of patriarchy contradicted the active role of women as participants in

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military campaigns and movements across time and space. It was specifically the role of women as fighters that generated new empirical research on women, conflict, and peace. This shift in empirical research on the role of women in active combat took place while new development studies explored the role of women in economic development.

2.0. Studying gender in security studies and feminist research

In traditional security studies there was not much room for gender or gender equality. The consensus was that gender has no or limited relevance to the topics appropriate to security studies, such as nuclear proliferation or international relations among states. There are three lines of thought as to why gender was not of interest to security studies scholars. One, historically most of decision makers were men, with very few women playing any role in decision making at the country level. Two, gender issues were not linked to high politics including national security. Three, for early empirical researchers in conflict and peace, gender was simply not a variable or something that could change. Thus, trying to include this in empirical models of war would not do much to explain changes in outcomes of war and peace across time or space.

On the other side of the theoretical and methodological research spectrum, feminist theorists have claimed most of the research on war and peace. War and political violence have been conceptualized as manifestations of hierarchical and patriarchal social structures. Hyper masculinities lead to dominance and violence. Military violence among and within states is an example of hierarchical power structures. For feminist scholars, anti-militarism defines their research agenda and methodology. As a result, they tend to also be anti-positivist, relying primarily on critical theories and methods to deconstruct social institutions and interpret violence during war and peace.

Feminist research has delivered very useful critiques on traditional security studies highlighting the relationships between gender and the power structures that generate violence. The critiques, however, never mounted to an alternative theoretical framework that can challenge existing assumptions of what drives political violence. A possible reason for the limited impact that feminism had on security studies was the paradox of gender stereotypes. While emphasizing masculinities and denouncing militarism, feminist researchers could not address the question of female combatants in both inter and intra-state wars.

Female combatants transcend types of conflicts, time, and location. From Boudica's revenge on the Romans and the destruction of *Camulodunum* –modern Colchester, where I currently live -- (circa AD 60), to the female snipers of the Soviet Union during WWII, such as Lyudmila Pavlichenko

aka Lady Death reported to have killed more than 300 during WWII, to the Kurdish female fighters that pushed back ISIS, female combatants in EL Salvador, to the female combatants during the Greek and Spanish civil wars (1930s-40s), and more recently the female fighters in Eritrea, there is no shortage of women taking up arms, as well as acting as agents of peace. There is one woman that stands above the rest in recent history: Laskarina 'Bouboulina' Pinotsi from the Greek island of Spetses. Bouboulina was a business woman, a merchant with a commercial fleet under her ownership, a widower, and a mother. At the mature age of 50, Bouboulina participated in the Greek War of Independence (1821) as naval commander. She contributed four vessels, including the largest one to the fight. Further, she maintained land troops with men from her island Spetses.ⁱⁱ

This woman was not a mythical creature or motivated by religious fervor. What was the motivation for her to assume such a role? And what was the impact of her participation to the actual fighting? Incidentally, Bouboulina allegedly personally protected Ottoman women during the fall of the city of Tripoli. Whatever this woman was, she was not a victim.ⁱⁱⁱ It is only fitting to such a female warrior that early empirical research on gender and conflict started from exploring women's participation in armed forces.

2.1. Early empirical research: gender as an analytical tool

Mady Segal, a sociologist, was one of the first scholars who explored what affects the degree and nature of women's participation in military forces in different contexts throughout history (1995). A little bit earlier Ester Boserup, a Danish economist who specialized in the economics of agriculture, was one of the first scholars to focus on the role of women in development.^{iv} Exploring the link between gender equality and development was part of mainstream research much earlier than the integration of gender as an analytical tool in the peace and conflict research (Hughes 2001). After the early work of Segal, it was Joshua Goldstein who put gender into the forefront of security studies and conflict research with his seminal 2001 book *War and Gender*. By combining six different disciplines this seminal work explored the gendered nature of warfare across human societies, especially the limited inclusion of women in war. Ironically, it was a mainstream male conflict researcher who propelled gender as an analytical framework in traditional security and conflict studies.

Researchers like Mary Caprioli (2000, 2005) and Erik Melander (2005) have adopted concepts such as gender equality and power differentials between men and women from the feminist research tradition and incorporated them to empirical models of conflict and peace. The

key message of their studies was that gender equal societies tend to have *fewer conflicts both internally and externally*. A possible mechanism that explain this empirical observation is the different quality of institutions and ways of handling social conflict that emerge in gender equal societies. Gender equality, defined as the provision of equal opportunities and access to resources for men and women, is inextricably linked with governance (Hudson et al. 2009). Meanwhile, in a similar vein of research, Louise Olsson (2000, 2009) started exploring gender mainstreaming and women's participation in multidimensional peacekeeping operations, while in my own work (Gizelis 2009, 2011) I argued that multidimensional peacekeeping operations' effectiveness improves when interacting with higher levels of women's status in post-conflict countries. In the development side of things, Esther Duflo (2003, see also Breierova and Duflo 2004) started questioning whether women's empowerment makes a difference to development outcomes. In the first experimental studies exploring if women make different choices than men, Duflo's research suggested that giving power to women leads to lower fertility rates. Furthermore, women make different financial decisions if given the opportunity, without minimizing the importance of fathers.

The years 2009-2010 were crucial for the newly emerging theme of gender equality in the conflict and peace research. In 2009 Louise Olsson set up the Folke Bernadotte Academy (FBA) research working group 1325, named after UN Security Council Resolution 1325. Security Council Resolution 1325 was the first official document that requested the protection of women during and after conflict in particular from sexual and gender-based violence, supported their participation in peace negotiations, and recommended the mainstreaming of policies to promote the interests of women. The specific aim was to strengthen the systematic approach and support the collection of gender disaggregated data. I joined the group in 2010 and established a unique collaborative relationship with Louise Olsson that still goes strong.

Picture 1 about here

The group combined a small group of selected academics some more established like Kyle Beardsley, Henrik Urdal, Ragnhild Nordås, Erik Melander, Dara Cohen, and Elizabeth Wood and some young PhD students at the very beginning of their careers such as Sabrina Karim, Helen Basini, and Jana Krause.

The FBA group 1325 met regularly from 2010 until January 2018. In these nine years the group created a unique environment bringing together senior and junior academics interested in the

systematic study of gender, conflict, and peace. While some research projects used the theoretical underpinnings of feminist research, overall the group applied empirical research methods linking the study of gender equality to mainstream research on conflict and peace. The output of research produced by the group members fundamentally changed the research agenda: thirty articles, many in leading journals such as *American Political Science Review*, *International Organizations*, two books, an edited special issue, and sixteen articles in progress. This scholarly output rendered the study of gender a legitimate research question in the study of conflict and peace.^v I am not claiming that FBA 1325 was the only reason the study gender in conflict and peace studies became part of the mainstream, but without a doubt the group created a unique space and supportive environment to foster research on the topic. The culmination of the collective work of the group, in addition to individual or collaborative projects, was the edited volume on *Gender, Peace and Security: Implementing UN Security Council Resolution 1325* (Routledge Studies in Peace and Conflict Resolution).

Picture 2 about here

2.2 UNSCR 1325 and systematic empirical research

The shift in research on gender, conflict and peace happened at a time when policy-makers had expressed increasing interest in the production of solid research for the implementation of the Women, Peace, and Security agenda. This convergence of academics and policy-makers on the importance of evidence-based policy created an environment of expectations of establishing clear selection criteria for cases, building datasets, and developing appropriate analytical tools. There was an acceptance that comparability of selected evidence is of interest not only to academic scholars but also to policy makers who seek to fulfil the objectives of the Women, Peace, and Security agenda. It is in this research and policy context that the systematic empirical research on gender, conflict, and peace grew and mushroomed. The remaining of this article will summarize key research findings in three areas: peacekeeping and gender, political participation of women, and protection from sexual and gender-based violence, as well as in overall health outcomes.

2.2.1 Gender, UN effectiveness, and peace

The literature uses two different concepts to capture peace. The first concept, most common initially in empirical studies, defines peace as ‘lack of active conflict’ and measures as a function of time. Peacekeeping missions that produce durable peace are deemed to be effective as a conflict management tool. My own work on the effectiveness of peacekeeping missions suggests that higher female status interacts with UN involvement to lead to sustainable peace. The prospects for successful post-conflict peace-building under the auspices of the United Nations (UN) are generally better in societies where women have greater levels of empowerment. Women’s status in a society reflects the existence of multiple social networks and domestic capacity not captured by purely economic measures of development (Gizelis 2009).

There is evidence that this interactive effect happens even when I look at peace as ‘quality of life’ rather than the absence of armed violence (Gizelis 2011).^{vi} Looking at regions in Sierra Leone and Liberia I found evidence that there is more cooperation and less conflictual attitudes towards UN activities in areas where women have relatively higher status. The cooperative attitude of locals towards the UN is even more pronounced when UN missions focus on policies addressing the quality of life in communities. Improved health outcomes, especially for pregnant women, is one policy area where the presence of UN has a positive impact. Pregnant women have better access to antenatal care and vaccinations either because the UN is actively involved in initiatives such as vaccination programs that target pregnant women or because the presence of peacekeepers creates a safe environment in regions where UN forces have been deployed.

2.2.2 Female participation in political processes

UN Security Council Resolution 1325 focused on women’s participation in negotiation processes as one of the areas of interest. While there is limited evidence on how women’s participation impacts peace negotiations, research has focused on female participation in the political process of post-conflict countries. The numbers of female participants to peace negotiations tend to be very small making systematic studies difficult and unreliable. Ellerby (2013) developed a framework to evaluate women’s inclusion on peace negotiations, while O’Reilly, Súilleabháin and Paffenholz (2015) compiled the first dataset of female negotiators.

Despite the small number of cases of female signatories to peace agreements, in one of the first comparative studies Krause, Krause, and Braenfors (2018) found that agreements signed by women show a significantly higher number of peace agreement provisions aimed at political reform, and higher implementation rates for provisions. Furthermore, links and networks between female

signatories and women's civil society organizations increase the chances that female signatories have a positive impact on the implementation of peace agreements. Recent studies on the impact of higher female participation on the quality of peace, are quite promising. Shair-Rosenfield and Wood (2017) found that higher female political representation increases the durability of peace. They identified female legislators' preferences to prioritize social welfare spending over military spending as a possible to more durable peace.^{vii}

Despite the positive findings from recent studies, there is still scepticism to what extent female participation positively impacts political processes. Bjarnegård and Melander (2013) argue that most studies do not test the hypothesized causal mechanisms. Is it larger numbers of female legislators or underlying social structures that impact durability of peace and the decision-making outcomes by legislative bodies? Ellerby (2016) further questions what we really measure when we look at women's participation. Is it just a question of numbers: the more women the better? Or there are more fundamental questions about the ability of women to have a meaningful voice on policy outcomes making a real difference. If the latter is the priority, then identifying when women can best articulate their true concerns and preferences is a more relevant question. Of course, this raises another question of whether all women share the same preferences. Can we treat women as one group when it comes to policy outcomes? Here the earlier work by Duflo can be a starting point to develop more nuanced arguments about women and political participation.

In accordance with agreed international conventions and decisions on gender equality increasing female participation is a highly desirable policy outcome. What are the best strategies to increase female participation? Here the literature remains quite inconclusive and rudimentary. Resolution 1325 promotes gender mainstreaming as a global strategy to promote gender equality in development and peace. Gender mainstreaming is based on three processes (1) to include both women and men's concerns and experiences as an integral component of all policies and their implementation (2) to assess the implications for women and men of any action, policy, project and so forth (3) these two processes should be part of the core work for peace, not a separate project. Overall, the literature converges on the proposition that gender mainstreaming leads to more prosperous societies with less conflict. While there is limited evidence to support this thesis, if we assume that it is an intrinsically worthwhile aim to pursue what is the best way to achieve gender mainstreaming?

The literature identifies two mechanisms: gender balancing (to improve participation of women) and gender budgeting (to assess implications of actions on both men and women). Gender balancing by improving women's participation produces a better peace outcome. Researchers who

study the effectiveness of peacekeeping missions and post-conflict reconstruction have pioneered studies on gender balancing. The aim is to evaluate if gender balancing has a positive impact on improving the effectiveness of peacekeeping missions and on supporting security sector reforms for more efficient and less corrupt security forces. Gender budgeting is more relevant to development projects, since it is an approach to strategic planning using fiscal policy and administration to promote greater gender equality in a wide range of sectors.

In summary, the research on gender balancing in peacekeeping forces – still in its infancy because of limited data – finds evidence that female personnel in the military and police tend to be deployed in low risk missions or conflict areas. Ironically, these are not the areas where they are mostly needed. In high risk conflicts, for instance, it is more likely to have high levels of sexual and gendered based violence. Thus, all things being equal one might expect higher numbers of female personnel to improve the performance of missions with mandates to protect civilians from harm. In fact, the opposite happens. But what about sexual exploitation and assault (SEA) by peacekeeping forces? Does an increase in female personnel reduce the presence of SEA incidents in peacekeeping missions? Sadly, there is no evidence that this is the case. Yet, it is worthwhile to note that the levels of female staff remain extremely low (below 4 per cent of total forces) and there is no upwards trend. With such low numbers of female participation, it is unlikely to find any meaningful effect of gender balancing on UN mission performance. Eighteen years after 1325 peacekeeping missions remain highly gendered spaces (Karim and Beardsley 2015, 2016; Karim and Henry 2017).

There are even fewer comparative studies on gender budgeting examining if women have different preferences than men over policies. Unfortunately, most of these studies are conducted in highly developed countries such as Switzerland. Women legislators tend to favour higher level of spending for public goods and the environment. Conversely, they vote for lower spending on agriculture and the military. Other studies in Sweden show that female legislators might vote for higher budget allocation for childcare and education relatively to elderly care; yet, voting preferences are not necessarily in line with female voters' priorities (Funk and Gathmann 2015; Svaleryd 2009). Research in Switzerland and Sweden cannot reflect the needs of women who live in lower levels of development. For example, agriculture is a major source of income for women, especially rural women in lower development countries. Similarly, electricity might be more relevant to women who spend time in unpaid work compared to other types of public goods. The complexity of local realities has led to limited evidence of success of gender-budgeting policies in post-conflict countries (Stotsky, 2016).

2.2.3 Security and protection

Studying sexual violence in war is challenging because of the emotive nature of the topic. While we have seen a ground-breaking change in the stand of the international community in terms of recognizing and combatting the problem, the underlying assumptions about the nature and frequency of sexual violence in wars by policymakers, practitioners, and academics alike currently obscure the systematic understanding of how it impacts women and men. Empirical research can here make a strong contribution. Cohen and Nordås (2014) build on earlier work by Elizabeth Wood (2009) to develop the first comprehensive dataset on sexual violence in civil wars. Their systematic study of sexual violence highlights three key insights that to some extent contradict common perceptions among politicians and other stakeholders. One, there is a lot of variation in sexual violence patterns across and within conflicts. Two, violence does not follow the same patterns as other forms of violence against civilians, rendering most common explanations of violence during conflict unsuitable to understand the phenomenon. In fact, the commonly held belief that sexual violence is a strategic weapon of war is not supported by evidence, in most cases at least. Third, women and girls are not the only targets of sexual violence, although they remain the largest percentage of victims. Men and boys are targeted at a higher degree than expected or acknowledged. Finally, sexual violence is not a 'silent crime' anymore. Recent evidence from my own work with Michelle Benson suggests that sexual violence might increase the likelihood of a UN Security council resolution controlling for all the other factors that might motivate the Security Council to focus on a conflict.

It might come as a surprise that sexual violence in conflict can impact the decision-making process of the Security Council, since there is a lot of emphasis in both research and media on the opposite problem; the sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) of vulnerable local populations by the peacekeepers themselves. Early attempts trying to evaluate the extent of SEA in mission reveal a lot of variation across missions. When SEA is occurring in missions, it is endemic among both the military and the civilian personnel (Karim and Beardsley 2016; Rustad and Nordås 2013). Yet, the emphasis on SEA obfuscates the more common problem of sexual exploitation in the form for transactional sex. The presence of peacekeepers increases the opportunities for vulnerable women in post-conflict countries to seek transactional relationships with peacekeepers and aid workers setting back any goals for empowerment and sustainable development (Beber et al 2017).

3.0. Promoting systematic research in gender, conflict, and peace: gaps and challenges

The empirical research on gender, conflict, and peace is a relatively new sub-field that brings together diverse traditions from sociology, feminist theory, international relations, and economic development. The common ground of all researchers included in this short review is the effort to systematically understand the role of gender in shaping outcomes of conflict and peace. Despite the increasing number of articles and new datasets, I identify four areas that scholars must address for the research agenda to further grow, deepen, and develop as part of the mainstream study of peace and conflict.

One of biggest weaknesses of most of the research presented here is the limited understanding of causal mechanisms. We still do not know how gender equality impacts peace processes. And often we assume rather than show that gender budgeting and balancing policies lead to greater gender equality. As a result, existing research sheds little light on how gender mainstreaming policies interact with underlying economic and social structures in post-conflict countries. Sometimes gender balancing can hurt leading to backlash rather than promoting gender empowerment (see Karim et al 2018). The existing datasets - e.g. the Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict or Women's Stats project - are not sufficient to realize the full potential of cross-national and time variant comparisons of links between gender equality and governance. Finally, lack of consensus on key concepts (e.g. what constitutes peace) hampers comparative research.

While these limitations constitute a major challenge for the field, I believe the biggest danger comes when research is 'highjacked' and translated into policy by using oversimplified interpretations of the research findings. This is a concern for all research and not unique to the systematic study of peace and conflict. However, as the sub-field is still developing under the aforementioned constraints, engaging with policy-makers can lead to claims about relationships that are not well understood or substantiated. The new global policy threats such as the rise of populism in Western democracies and the current global economic crisis further threaten the viability of the field, as well as policies supportive of gender equality. Without a good understanding of how gender equality is linked to development and peace exaggerated claims can undermine the validity of research findings. Or policymakers can pay lip service to policies using ideological arguments rather than solid research evidence.

As a final note the study of gender, conflict, and peace is a mushrooming sub-field aiming to become part of the mainstream. The contribution of the field is the emphasis on gender as an analytical framework to understand processes of peace and conflict independent from other institutions. There is clear support to the claim that gender equality is a different dimension of development and social capacity. Yet, existing evidence on best policies and practices are more

nuanced than often construed. This creates an opportunity for further research and a challenge to for the field to further develop and ascertain clear findings of what works and what does not.

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Pictures and Figures

Picture 1



(Workshop on Gender and Local Ownership, Carlton House, June 2013, picture Zorzeta Bakaki)

Picture 2



(Research for Peace, Folke Bernadotte Academy, Stockholm June 2015, picture Sabrina Karim)

Picture 3



(UNPOL female officers, Parade during the Training Conference in Barcelona, October 2016, picture Ismene Gizelis)

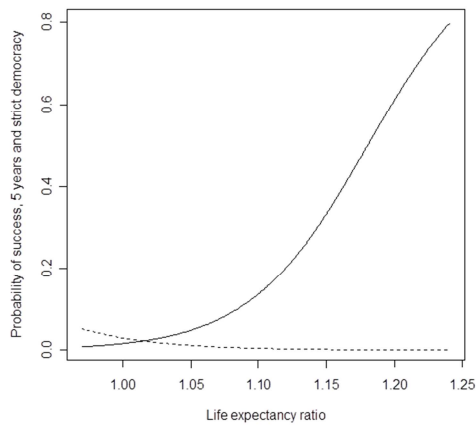


Figure 1: Probability of success 5 years after and strict democracy by life-expectancy ratio for cases with an UN operation (solid line) and cases without an UN operation (dotted line) (Gizelis 2009, JPR)

ⁱ This is an illustrative, but not exhaustive list of the work done by female academics in the last twenty years. They have contributed to a wide range of topics from conflict and institutions, bargaining models of conflict management and cooperation, peacekeeping, frozen states, rebel structures and conflict fragmentation, sexual violence, environment and conflict, and conflict dynamics (Autesserre 2010; Bakke and Wibbels 2006; Barbieri 1996; Cohen 2013; Cunningham 2011; Hartzell and Hoddie 2003; Hultman, Kathman and Shannon 2014; Filson and Werner 2004; Fortna 2008; Kadera, Crescenzi and Shannon 2003; Karim and Beardsley 2017, Leeds 1999; Mitchell 2002; Nordås and Gleditsch 2007; Østby 2008; Powers 2006; Raleigh et al. 2010; Thomas 2014; Thomas and Bond 2015; Walter 1997.

ⁱⁱ She was the only woman until recently to hold the rank honorary rank of Admiral in the Russian Navy, while in April 2018 she was awarded the rank of vice-admiral by the Greek State.

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/greece/5989510/Greek-woman-sets-fire-to-Britons-genitals-Laskarina-Bouboulina-the-heroine.html>. <http://greece.greekreporter.com/2018/04/28/greece-honors-heroine-of-war-of-independence-193-years-after-her-death/>. (accessed on 01/08/2018).

^{iv} Boserup, Tan, and Toulmin 2013.

^v Data compiled and very kindly shared by Sabrina Karim.

^{vi} For more information on the conceptualization of peace in the academic literature please refer to Olsson and Gizelis 2014).

^{vii} In a study focusing on female equality indicators, Demeritt, Nichols, and Kelly (2014) found evidence that higher levels of female literacy are correlated with lower likelihood that conflict will relapse.