

The Impact of Viewing Women as Predominantly Peacebuilders

El impacto de ver a las mujeres como predominantemente constructoras de paz

Jean Joan Boy

Universidad Jaume I, Facultad de Ciencias Humanas y Sociales, Castellón de la Plana, España.

jeanjoanboy@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/0009-009-1035-9635>

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Abstract

Since the adoption of UNSCR 1325 in 2000, the role of women in peace building has gained increasing attention in international policy and research. The resolution recognizes the disproportionate impact of conflict on women and calls for their increased participation in all aspects of peace building. While this has been an important step towards gender equality and promoting women's rights, the impacts of these generally accepted notions of women's roles in conflict have rarely been assessed. This research analyzes the extent to which a predominant focus on women as natural peace-builders has impacted various peace initiatives thus hindering sustainable peace. The main objective is how 'woman' has been overstated in peace building in a bid to promote women's participation in peace processes. This study is a critique of the mainstream narratives that advocate for women's peace activism. It has therefore used hermeneutic and discourse analysis in an attempt to deconstruct women's natural pacifism.

Keywords: Peace-builders, Perpetrators, Sustainable Peace.

Resumen

Desde la adopción de la Resolución 1325 del Consejo de Seguridad de la ONU en 2000, el papel de la mujer en la consolidación de la paz ha sido objeto de creciente atención en la política y la investigación internacionales. La resolución reconoce el impacto desproporcionado de los conflictos en las mujeres y pide una mayor participación de éstas en todos los aspectos de la consolidación de la paz. Si bien esto ha supuesto un paso importante hacia la igualdad de género y la promoción de los derechos de la mujer, únicamente en contadas ocasiones se han evaluado las repercusiones de estas ideas ampliamente aceptadas sobre su papel en los conflictos. Esta investigación analiza cómo el hecho de centrarse exclusivamente en las mujeres en su condición de constructoras de la paz ha repercutido en diversas iniciativas que buscaban este logro, obstaculizando así que la misma fuese sostenible. El objetivo principal es conocer cómo se ha "exagerado" el papel de la "mujer" en la construcción de la paz en un intento de promover su participación en dichos procesos. Esta investigación evalúa críticamente las narrativas hegemónicas que han configurado en gran medida el activismo de paz de las mujeres; para ello, se ha empleado el análisis discursivo y hermenéutico

Palabras clave: Constructores de la paz, Perpetradores, Paz sostenible.

Introduction

Although there is a lot of factual data on women's diversity of experiences in violent conflict, there is an obstinate persistence of the "women and peace hypothesis" (Maoz, 2012), which is the idea that women, and mothers in particular, are naturally inclined towards peace. Moreover, these ideas have been institutionalized, and in so doing, the women and peace hypothesis (WPH) has become a strong conceptual framework for women in politically mobilizing for change (Abduljaber, 2021). To be more specific, although the WPS agenda and resolution 1325 has allowed an opening to the analysis of women as combatants, there is difficulty in talking about violence by women in the WPS architecture where there is a strong orientation towards women as pacifists. Consequently, ontological constructions of women as being inherently peaceful have been reaffirmed and have obscured perceptions of women's use of violence thus impacting positive peace (Banwell, 2020)

This research analyzes how widely accepted clichés of women being inherently peaceful have had an impact on positive peace. It is a reconceptualization of the role of women as peacebuilders. I believe that women cannot effectively promote peace unless they are recognized as active agents with the capacity to exercise their agency in both constructive and destructive capacities. It is particularly important in the Kenyan context where high rates of male battering are registered yet factors making women susceptible to perpetrating violence have not been adequately explored. The main objective of this research is to highlight the need to focus on the plurality of women's experiences in violent conflict to achieve imperfect peace.

Theoretical framework

Postmodern feminism sets the foundation for this research. It advocates for the diverse of experiences of women in violent conflict. To this end some of the authors include: -Kaufman, J and Williams, K (2013) who assert that although women have diverse experiences in violent conflict, The role of women in political violence is rarely discussed due to the underlying assumptions that women are inherently nonviolent. They contend that women should not discount the use of violence as a tool for political action, as it serves as a manner of expressing agency, particularly for those women who are subjected to political violence.

Similarly, Cynthia Cockburn (2009) dismisses notions of women's pacifism arguing that their understanding of the actual situation is lacking. She observes an overstatement of the role that women have played in promoting peace to

further their peacebuilding efforts, thus limiting attention to their roles as offenders.

Cooke and Woollacott (2014) further emphasize the need for women to voice out their experiences in conflict. They argue that war is a domain in which gender roles are eroded, therefore, by clinging to their traditional roles of caregivers, and nurturers, that confine them to the home setting, women affirm that they are indeed in need of protection and lose out on an opportunity to obtain equality with men.

Methodology

This research employs a critical discourse analysis of the secondary data collected on women and war. This approach unravels how societal power relations as it pertains to gender are established and reinforced, thus continuing structural inequalities. It allows me to challenge hegemonic narratives on women as peacebuilders which have strong foundations in frameworks that enhance the participation of women in peace building. It further employs a hermeneutic approach thus allowing me to scrutinize elements like the efficacy of women's peace activism on their empowerment which are hardly questioned within mainstream ideas. These approaches provide a comprehensive view of women's involvement in conflict and, hence, will be useful in developing strategies for pre- and post-conflict peace initiatives.

Impact on women's emancipation

Gender roles and norms are widely accepted as the primary cause of inequality against women (SDG's 2017: objective 5). However, in most countries, these concepts are still highly valued, therefore they continue to be prominent. In light of the aforementioned, the global community has pledged to support women's empowerment to achieve gender parity in all spheres of life. Although this seems like a good initiative, the irony lies in the fact that efforts to empower women, especially as peace builders to increase their involvement in peacebuilding processes, are predicated on the gender roles of mothers, nurturers, and caregivers, roles that have long served to exclude women from decision-making positions (Franceschet, 2004). Perhaps this explains why enormous efforts to get women into peace negotiation deals have not yielded the expected results as participation of women in official peace negotiation deals is still minimal (Schneiker, 2021). Despite the possibility that the process of inclusion is gradual, an examination of the parties in peace negotiations reveals that their exclusion is primarily due to the narratives that surround their peacebuilding activism. In much more precise terms, Parties engaged in conflict frequently control

peace negotiations. primarily “men”, who risk their lives in battle to protect their territories and fight structural injustices that exist in their communities. Since women have monopolized peace building, they have bolstered the notion that they are, in fact, the protectors (anti-militarists), and have remained marginalized in militaristic agendas like peace talks.

Additionally, for most warring factions, as James A. Shear noted In a Stanford University news release Why peace agreements often fail to end civil wars,

“ Sometimes war is safer than peace unless you are on the losing end. It generates profit and even provides employment. Peace on the other hand is a leap into the unknown; it is full of promises that can come undone”

Based on James Shear’s theory, skilled negotiators are skilled warmakers who can persuade opposing sides that a peaceful resolution would be in their best interests. Since women are considered to be largely engaged in peace building, they are assumed to lack the required skillset in this field and are excluded.

On the other hand, while ideas of leadership have been mostly associated with being feared, “a warrior”. As suggested by (Amy J.C 2013a)in the Harvard Business Review, there has been a major shift of ideas and increased acknowledgment of the fact that leadership requires exceptional social skills rather than physical strength (Yuval, 2012). This implies that women possess an advantage over males as they are known for their impeccable ability to mobilize and create networks. However, the institutionalization of peace has encouraged constant socialization of women to be peaceful and adhere to nonviolence ergo exclusion in politics. Precisely, a good leader should be merciful, peaceful, generous, and tolerant but should also possess a —criminal virtue necessary for the security of that state (Machiavelli, 1513). According to Machiavelli the criminal virtue must be carried out when it is absolutely necessary for the state and should not be frequent lest callous cruelty grows. In this respect, women capitalizing on their diversity, possess all the requirements for leadership. Nevertheless, a monolithic approach to their roles as predominantly peacemakers limit their prospects.

Similarly, the socialization of women into being peaceful has led to women distancing themselves from the military. Degroot et al. (2000) contend that while feminists have persistently pressed governments and military institutions to allow women to serve in combat, very few women aspire to work in this area. Although it is possible to refute this claim by arguing that an increasing number of women are enlisting in the army, Creveld (2000)

notes that an increasing number of women are doing so, because the enemy has vanished. Women therefore enlist with the hope of never engaging in combat. Baaz and Stern (2011) supporting Creveld’s (2000) findings note that many modern armies have switched from fighting to peacekeeping and humanitarian missions, they conclude that the foregoing has brought attention to the necessity of women in peacekeeping as women are perceived to be morally responsible individuals who can imbue their feminine traits to men within their proximity (Baaz and Stern, 2011:572).

(Cossa, S & Palik, J,2023) also observe that a singular emphasis on women as peacebuilders has permeated the field of policy where women have been left out of the benefits of Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) programs. (Cossa, S & Palik, J,2023). DDR is an extremely challenging process, especially as everyone becomes a target after violence and should be treated as such throughout subsequent peace building efforts. The process has become simpler and less expensive, though, as women are now recognized as peacemakers. In other words, men have been singled out for DDR’s attention and have reaped its rewards by sticking to their positions as peacemakers. As a result, a significant proportion of female veterans continue to be extremely vulnerable to using violence. While it is true that there aren’t many female ex-combatants in comparison to men, it is important to remember that young girls and women who were kidnapped and forced to become the wives of ex-combatants are also vulnerable to violence. Moreover, de Watteville (2002:1) observes that despite rare in number, female ex-combatants are often more susceptible than male ex-combatants.

The Impact on War

High degree of complexity of intrastate conflicts at the end of the Cold War blurred the battlefield lines as wars moved into towns and villages (Kaldor,M 2013:1). Consequently, there were innumerable amounts of civilian casualties predominantly women and children (Cooke and Woollacott,2014, p.1). These ideas gave rise to the Myth of Protection. (Tickner A, 2004) argues that the myth of protection rests on the concept that wars are fought to primarily protect women, children, and the extremely vulnerable. This myth has blinded us to the participation of men as victims of violent conflict. In much more precise terms, since men do not fall in the “vulnerable” category, men in general—even those without weapons—have always been viewed as fighters. (Elshtain, 1998:455). The failure to recognize men as victims of violent conflict potentially endangers the lives of many as it has made them acceptable targets for warfare (Jones, 2009). Accor-

ding to Jones, there are disparities in casualties because of the ways that men and women are perceived differently. He goes on to say that non-combatant men of war age, or around fifteen to fifty-five years old, are the most vulnerable and persistently targeted both historically and in the modern world (Jones, 2009:153).

The Wagalla massacre in Kenya serves as a prime example, wherein over 5,000 Somali men belonging to the Degodia clan were mercilessly killed by Kenyan soldiers at the Wagalla Airstrip in Wajir county. This act of violence was carried out as a form of “collective punishment,”—a deliberate act of state aggression against its populace intended to uphold “peace.”(Anderson, D,2014). Women were brutally tortured and raped, while men were rounded up, burnt to death, and shot on sight. In an interview with BBC News, Sahara Kanaan a victim of the massacre testifies on how her father, brother, and uncle were brutally killed right before her eyes (“Wagalla massacre”, 2011).

Similarly, in society today, Countless defenseless boys and men are fatally shot without any indication that they pose a threat. The Kenyan extrajudicial killings present a good case study where between 2013 and 2015 over 800 young youths were ruthlessly murdered by police (Rajab, 2017, May 30). The situation persists as Juliet Wanjira, a campaigner with the Mathare Social Justice Center (MSJC) confirms that being a young man in a slum area in Nairobi is indeed a crime while attesting to the escalated rate of killings of young men in Mathare- a slum in Nairobi (BBC,8 July 2016).

Conversely, women are now increasingly engaging in violence- terrorism in particular and are prime targets of radicalization due to ease in carrying out attacks (Bloom,2022). As was observed in the 2013 West Gate terror attack In Kenya where the involvement of Samatha Lewthwaite also known as the “White Widow ” was widely publicized due to her crucial yet undetected involvement. Similarly, the radicalization of young Kenyan Somali women In Kenya by the Alshabab has been on the rise since the inception of the group demonstrating the need for women in radical groups.

Impacts on The Justice System

Gender stereotypes continue to be very prevalent even though women have made significant progress toward achieving gender equity. While in most situations they have impacted women negatively, sometimes, these preconceptions have benefited women, particularly in the realm of criminal justice (Doerner and Demuth

2014,p.250). To start with, only two women in comparison to 280 men have been convicted in the International Criminal Courts and tribunals. Biljana Plavsic, the Serbian politician who pleaded guilty in the International Criminal Tribunal for former Yugoslavia (ICTY), And Pauline Nyiramasuhuko whom the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) found guilty and gave a life sentence.

Though it could be argued that because women make up the majority of victims, they are less likely to engage in violence hence the low conviction rates, empirical research consistently demonstrates that victims are more likely to become perpetrators (Boateng, F. D., & Campbell, C. 2022). Dominic Ongwen, a prominent commander in the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA), serves as an example. Although it is evident that he was a victim of Joseph Kony’s violence before turning into a perpetrator, there were calls for him to be held fully accountable for his acts in front of an international criminal court. This raises questions of whether judges are more forgiving of women (Chase, M. 2008). Especially since most women who are compelled to marry fighters frequently adopt the victim role and even go so far as to actively commit acts of violence with their husbands, yet none of them have been found guilty of such crimes alongside their husbands. Perhaps the latter is due to the belief that women’s participation in violence is minor, however, it should be noted that women’s prowess in mobilizing networks makes them a powerful tool in violence. As observed during the MAUMAU uprising in Kenya where women were the ones who kept the uprising afloat, recruiting new members and hiding the warriors. In this sense, one could say that when it comes to violence, women are just as deadly as men.

Another question that arises from the low number of persecutions of women internationally is whether only women in politics are capable of massively escalating violence. The notion is completely misconstrued, especially considering that some women can become powerful just by their husbands’ positions as heads of state. While some women do not meddle with their husbands’ work, some do and are recognized for having an impact on their husbands’ choices. One well-known example is the late Mira Markovic, the widow of the former president of Serbia and Yugoslavia, who is credited as being her husband’s inspiration. She inspired him to strive for power at all costs. In fact, she was termed the most influential woman in state affairs (Djukic,2001) yet she wasn’t prosecuted alongside her husband.

Similarly, there is frequent underrepresentation of women who commit violence. For instance, in the Rwan-

dan Genocide, numerous other women played key roles worthy of persecution by an international court, however, Pauline Nyiramasuhuko was the only one convicted. One such example is Agathe Kanziga, the widow of President Juvénal Habyarimana, who funded an extremist tabloid and radio station that was notorious for encouraging acts of murder (The New Yorker, 2010). Furthermore, African Rights (1995) affirmed in their research that women took part in indoctrination seminars and, consequently, helped prepare for genocide. According to the report, women were among the most brutal local government officials responsible for organizing the executions, particularly in Kigali (African Rights, 1995: 15). This leads me to draw the inference that international courts and tribunals are reluctant to convict women.

Ideas of women's pacifism has also affected how women who are accused of crime are perceived and treated by society and the justice system at large as women who engage in violence are often seen as aberrations, deviant from their role as nurturers and caregivers consequently they receive harsher sentences (Quadrelli, 2003). Conversely, those who appeal to the stereotypes of a woman needing protection and adhere to the stereotypical roles of a wife or mother tend to be treated leniently (Goulette and others 2015: 415). This has caused a resurgence of violence, thus posing a threat to sustainable peace. To put it more accurately, many women receive preferential treatment by appealing to the traditional roles of the housewife and mother and receive lighter sentences. As a result, they escape the consequences of their conduct from the law, and justice may not accomplish its intended goal. As a result, the victim becomes more vulnerable to violence, perpetuating the cycle of violence.

Conclusion

The illustration above acknowledges the danger of a singular emphasis on women as peacebuilders. Thus, it suggests that women need to go beyond the notions of their inherent peacefulness. Whilst true that these concepts have been beneficial for their emancipation in a politically retrograde environment; Social and political upheavals have given women the chance to confront these damaging prejudices, thereby allowing them to embrace and bring in their different experiences in pre-and post-conflict situations. This will not only enhance their peace building efforts as it will be from a holistic approach, but it will also be pertinent in achieving sustainable peace.

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