



Editorial

This issue of *Peace Prints* on “Gender, Peace and Conflict” builds on a growing body of feminist reflections on epistemology, methodology, peace and conflict issues as it has evolved over the years. Since the late 1980s and particularly with the publication of the special issue of the journal *Millennium*, in 1988, there has been a proliferation of feminist writings that has considerably influenced the way we think and shape the disciplinary contours of International Relations. At the core of International Relations was the Westphalian nation-state system with its entrenched patriarchy and its associated social hierarchies, which had for many years steadfastly resisted admitting gender as a cross-cutting issue in the workings of the international system.

For feminist International Relations scholars, the uncritical acceptance of the state as the most important constitutive element of the international system and as the chief guarantor of peace and security was clearly problematic. They contend that the paradigm of ‘national’ security does not address the myriad vulnerabilities that come out of socially differentiated experiences of insecurity. It neither takes into account the vulnerabilities of women in situations of conflict or ‘post-conflict’, nor does it create a space for factoring in women’s activism in areas that are outside the public sphere.

The Feminist project also made a natural extension into the fields ‘traditionally’ allied to International Relations, which included *inter alia* Peace and Conflict Studies, as peace, security and conflict issues were seen as key areas of international politics. Not surprisingly, Peace and Conflict Studies also borrowed from the multidisciplinary insights that International Relations itself accepted from the late 1980s onwards, as it first carved out its own disciplinary niche, and then interrogated its older paradigms of conflict management and conflict resolution, moving towards the more contemporary frameworks of conflict prevention, conflict transformation and a more nuanced understanding of peacebuilding. Feminists made definitive inroads into these new frameworks of understanding and responding to conflict by engendering the new discourses that flowed from it.

Much of the writings around women, war and peace that constitute part of the project to engender conflict studies had, at least in the initial stages, remained mired in the nature-nurture debates. They revolved around the question as to whether women are inherently more peaceful than men or if they are more peaceful because of the processes of socialization, and, either way, if the ‘call to motherhood’ could be used as a plank for women’s peace activism. There were others who sounded a note of caution suggesting that political projects on peacebuilding that draw on an essentialist logic could be laced with

danger. While it might, in the short run, help rally women as peace activists opposed to war and violence, the emphasis of women's 'essentially' peaceful nature as the basis of this activism could also backfire in the long run. Arguably it could be used to strengthen the bases of patriarchy and create further oppressive regimes by turning a Nelson's eye to the structural causes of conflict. In any case the essentialist argument appeared to be empirically unsustainable as well, with several examples to suggest that women have not shied away from participating in violent militant movements in some cases, even as they have been the forerunners of peace activism in others.

Moving away from the dichotomies of the nature-nurture debates, another strand of literature emerged on issues of victimhood and agency of women particularly in times of conflict. Significantly, this also provided a context to examine changes that conflict could generate in terms of gender roles, gender identities, gendered power structures and gender ideologies. It was acknowledged that conflict could indeed create spaces, (some of which were no doubt unintended) for empowering women by altering the pattern of gender roles and gender identities, but whether this would produce concomitant changes in gender ideologies and gendered power structures remained an open question. Gender analysts have to be forever alive to the possibility that even as the changes in gender roles and identities appear to be facilitating a new empowerment of women following protracted conflict, patriarchal power is also being reconstructed and reconfigured at the same time and may well emerge in a different shape and form.

Contemporary feminists who have written on issues of peace and conflict have now taken the discussions to a whole new plane by focusing on the complex webs of relationships at the intersection of caste, class, kinship, community, race and culture during periods when the state and society are increasingly being militarized; when inequities associated with globalization and modern paradigms of development are creating social schisms even during times of apparent peace; and when so called 'post- conflict' reconstruction and rebuilding plans are under way following periods of violent conflict. These discussions recognize the resilience of patriarchy even as it acknowledges that patriarchy is intrinsically linked with militarism and is a major stumbling block to sustainable peace and equity.

In researching peace and conflict issues framed by feminist lenses, the issue of epistemology invariably surfaces. Feminists cannot but ask: who creates acceptable knowledge, who validates and authenticates it and for whom? Who decides what is to be rendered visible and what is to be relegated to the zone of the invisible? How does the feminist researcher's own location, history and experience impact the research process?

This edition of *Peace Prints* features a mix of reflections, academic articles, voices from the field and a book review that indicates how gender mediates the field of peacebuilding.

Mari Fitzduff's reflective piece *Women and War in Northern Ireland: A Slow Growth to Power* explores the changing role of women in the conflict in Northern Ireland from their limited

function in violence containment and conflict amelioration to their eventual expanded role as conflict transformers and political peacebuilders. The journey from the realm of community work that focused on social issues and education that respects diversity, to active political work designed to mediate the Belfast agreement of 1998 carries lessons for women and peacebuilding that go beyond the immediate context of Northern Ireland. South Asian scholars and activists will find useful resonances and templates for understanding here despite the differences in the historical and political contexts of the conflicts. Fitzduff's own position as a woman who has lived amidst the protracted conflict and worked actively as a peacebuilder makes this story and the lessons drawn from it particularly persuasive.

Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian in her article titled *Palestinian Women and the Politics of Invisibility: Towards a Feminist Methodology* uses a series of compelling narratives from the field to 'visibilize' the lives of Palestinian women and girls living under the shadow of what she calls the Israeli 'security theology.' Her writing focuses on 'unheard' voices and 'unseen' images of Palestinian women and girls - rendered inaudible and invisible by the trappings of global capitalism, militarism and neo-colonial projects of state-building - that wreck havoc on the lives and livelihoods of citizens, particularly women, and block them out from mega narratives of the conflict. Turning the searchlights on one stark act - the act of demolishing homes - Shalhoub-Kevorkian raises a series of questions that have continued to baffle feminist scholars and activists. What does the 'home' actually symbolize, particularly in a situation of active conflict? Is it a place of refuge or as some feminists point out, a place of oppression? How does a feminist scholar-activist locate herself/himself on this canvas when s/he is an integral part of the scenario that is being researched? What is the responsibility of the researcher to the 'subjects' s/he is researching? While definitive answers are difficult to come by, the very fact that these are relevant questions in researching any situation of conflict renders them extremely significant.

If the context of the Palestinian question has rendered women in Palestine 'invisible,' in Nepal, the Maoist led People's movement has offered a contrasting image of highly visible women 'polishing their guns' and ostensibly forming 30 per cent of the combat forces. Rita Manchanda's paper *Women's Question in Nepal's Democratic Post-Conflict Transition: Towards a Policy Research Agenda* critically examines the impact of the Maoist movement in shaping a new consciousness among women in Nepal. Nepal's dramatic transition into democracy following the People's movement popularly known as Jana Andolan II had stunned the world with its sheer pace and momentum. In ensuring that 33 per cent of seats in the Constituent Assembly would be occupied by women, Nepal appeared to blaze a new trail in engendering politics and policies. Manchanda draws attention to an important gap in research on contemporary Nepal - namely an inadequate empirical mapping of the changes that occurred at the grassroots level in the course of the Maoist led People's War - and the extent to which this paved the way for the ascent of women to the Constituent Assembly mandated to create the institutional edifice for an inclusive, egalitarian democracy. In

seeking to fill that gap Manchanda also touches upon vital question of women combatants and their reintegration into society – a thorny issue that persists till date.

A different scenario where a woman has been ‘visible’ not as an epitome of a violent militant struggle but as an apostle of a unique non-violent, Gandhian struggle is captured through the life and times of Irom Sharmila of Manipur in India’s highly militarized North East. A legislation called the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, which provides extraordinary powers to the Indian Army operating in Manipur and other parts of the Northeast has had horrific impact on civilians, especially women of the region, prompting Irom Sharmila to protest against it through a uniquely Gandhian form of resistance - the act of indefinite fasting. Her struggle in the context of increasing militarization and the broader relevance of Gandhian forms of resistance within the contemporary framework of peacebuilding is described and analysed by Deepti Priya Mehrotra in her article titled *Irom Sharmila’s Protest Fast: Women’s Wars, Gandhian Non-Violence and Anti-militarization Struggles*.

Mainstream definitions of war and conflict tend to classify entire countries ‘at war’ or ‘at peace.’ In doing so, they gloss over situations where congealed violence persists in the interstices even when active hostilities have petered out. For example, in cases of conflict-induced displacement, all too common in contemporary conflict scenarios across the world, the displaced continue to face enormous everyday violence and insecurities at camp sites which are often shielded from the public eye simply because the violence is not played out in the formal political field. A peace agreement offers little guarantee of protection from gender based violence - indeed it may even bring in its wake a disturbing culture of impunity and new forms of violence - as Swarna Rajagopalan argues in her article *Gender Violence, Conflict, Internal Displacement and Peacebuilding*.

Most of the authors in this issue of *Peace Prints* implicitly accept that gender is not just a matter of personal identity but an analytical tool that is as much about men and masculinity as it is about women and femininity. Judith Large in her contribution *The Restructuring of Masculinities as a Dynamic in War and Peace* and Brandon Hamber in his essay *Masculinity and Transitional Justice: An Exploratory Essay* explore this in greater depth.

Judith Large examines the notion of masculinity particularly in times of violent conflict, reminding us that like femininity, masculinity too involves multiple identities. It is consequently necessary to factor in relationships *among* men along with relationships between men and women in laying out the template for a gender perspective to conflict and peace. The existence of ‘multiple masculinities’ is particularly important in the context of societies with divided cultural identities and overlooking this can create a false picture of gender relations that can mask a whole set of hidden hierarchies. In fact the existence of hegemonies amidst multiple masculinities may complicate the puzzle even further but this is a lived reality that plays itself out particularly in the iconography of contemporary violent conflicts typically characterized by, the ‘re-masculinization’ of war.

Brandon Hamber in further unpacking the implications of masculinities points to some of the key literature on this subject and explores its connect with processes of transitional justice, using South Africa as a case in point. Transitional justice is now a burgeoning field that is considered integral to peacebuilding and the repertoire of judicial and non-judicial approaches it uses including truth telling, reparations, trauma healing, and community reconciliation have a special resonance with reference to South Africa in the post-apartheid era. The assertions of violent masculinities even as mechanisms of transitional justice are in operation need to be analysed in the context of fluid gender identities at a time of rapid transition. Hamber suggests that the linkages between the mechanisms of transitional justice, broader social reforms and prevention of gender based violence call for further investigation and multiple masculinities must be treated a cross-cutting variable in this matrix.

Peace Prints also contains a section on 'Experiments with peacebuilding' that seeks to document actual practices of dialogue and peacebuilding in diverse theatres across the world. This edition of *Peace Prints* describes a dialogic interactive workshop between women from India and Pakistan by facilitators Meenakshi Chhabra from India and Anila Asghar from Pakistan, documented in their joint article *Applying the Interactive Problem Solving Approach: A Workshop between Indian and Pakistani Women*. Conceptualized as a problem solving workshop, women from both countries engaged in facilitated discussions on contentious issue that have separated the two neighbours using the partition of 1947 as a starting point. A shared concern for the rights of women in both countries provided a leitmotif for engagement.

In another perspective from the field, Emma Reinhardt's collection of narratives from women's peacebuilders in Wajir district of Kenya forms the basis of her article *Building Safe Communities through Story Sharing*. By weaving narratives of women building peace into the framework of a programme called HerVoices founded by Reinhardt to facilitate cross-cultural understanding, she demonstrates how relationship building and dialogue lies at the heart of conflict transformation and peacebuilding.

The 'Book Review' section features an important contribution to the area of gender and peacebuilding in the form of an edited volume by Dubravka Zarkov, titled *Gender, Violent Conflict and Peacebuilding*. Manjrika Sewak in her comprehensive review of this volume evaluates both the theoretical and the empirical insights from this collection, anchoring it within the current state of the field of peacebuilding.

The collection of research articles and field perspectives in this edition of *Peace Prints* draws on a repertoire of experiences and scholarship from across the world and in diverse contexts, yet at one level all of them bring us back to a common drawing board. They all reflect in some way or another on the critical question of how asymmetrical power and gender relations can shape the experience of violence. Moreover, by mapping the landscape through Feminist lenses the contributors to this volume alert us to the dangers imminent in

the uncritical use of the terms war, 'post-conflict' and peace. They remind us that gendered violence is not just a feature of wartime – it can be ever present during times of 'post-conflict' reconstruction and even during times of apparent peace.

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