The Gendered Impact of Peace

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Much has been written about women’s experiences during wars and, after well over a decade of feminist lobbying, there has been generalised international recognition that women play key roles during wars, carrying heavy socio-economic burdens and themselves suffering casualties. Such a shift away from women being virtually invisible in analyses of conflict has been facilitated by a common understanding that so-called ‘new wars’ led to an increased vulnerability of civilians, and that women and children have become major casualties (Giles and Hyndman, 2004: 3–5). Nevertheless, more men than women continue to die directly from all violence in the world, as well as directly from war (Pearce, 2006; WHO, 2002). However, on average, more women than men die or suffer serious disease as a result of interstate and internationalised civil wars when the post-conflict period is included (Plümer and Neumayer, 2006: 3). Furthermore, because in the post-war context women survivors generally outnumber men as a group, they bear the greater burdens of post-war recovery (see, e.g., Turshen, 2001b: 58). In this context, and in highly varied cultural settings, women face distinct difficulties in seeking justice for crimes committed against them during wars and afterwards when they attempt to participate in ‘truth and reconciliation’ endeavours, and when they attempt to re-build their lives.

This chapter thus interrogates the ways in which the endings of war still often bring highly gendered, often violent, challenges from men and the state. It is split into five sections and a conclusion. The first assesses the post-war backlash against women – the attempt to force women into ‘traditional’ gender roles as well as the increase in gender-based violence in the post-war period. The second section focuses on the impact of the post-war political context on women, in particular the attempt to institute the rule of law. It concludes that transitional systems of justice fail to address the needs of women. This failure is also observed in post-war truth and reconciliation processes which are assessed in the third section. The fourth section outlines the struggle to enhance women’s civil and political participation after war.
and concludes that while gains have been made, there is still much to be done. The fifth section focuses on the gender implications of post-war socio-economic policies in both rural and urban settings. The conclusion is that despite considerable institutional knowledge about the needs of women, they remain marginalised in post-war strategies.

**Post-war backlash against women**

The post-conflict environment is not one in which life for women returns to ‘normal’ – even if a return to previous patterns of gender and social relationships were desirable or even possible. The upheaval of war, in which societies have been transformed and livelihood systems disrupted, in which women have assumed certain roles for the first time or come into contact with new ideas, has its own impact on inter-personal relationships and social expectations. Furthermore, evidence from gendered analyses of post-war situations in the former Yugoslavia, sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, Asia and elsewhere shows that women face not only continuation of some of the aggression they endured during the war, but also new forms of violence (Rehn and Sirleaf, 2002). In the design of policies for post-war reconstruction, women’s needs are often systematically ignored, and even deliberately marginalised (Cockburn, 2004: 41; El Bushra, 2004; Goldstein, 2001: 394–5; Meintjes et al., 2001a).

Together, the continued and new forms of violence, and the attacks on women’s newly assumed rights and behaviours, constitute what frequently amounts to a post-war backlash against women (Meintjes et al., 2001b: 12; Pankhurst, 2003: 11; Pankhurst and Pearce, 1998; Turshen, 2001a: 84). This seems to be common across contrasting social, economic and geographical contexts although the specific forms vary (Meintjes et al., 2001a). Two key common elements seem to be: an ‘anti-women’ discourse with associated restrictions on the life choices of women (El Bushra, 2004; Meintjes et al., 2001b: 12–14); and violence against women which continues above pre-conflict levels and sometimes at a higher level than during war (Rehn and Sirleaf, 2002; Chapter 18 in this volume).

The backlash discourse is often about ‘restoring’ something associated with peace in the past – even where the change actually undermines women’s rights in favour of an unambiguously male gender politics – and strongly associates women with cultural notions of ‘tradition’, motherhood and peace, using new and old cultural norms (Turshen, 2001a: 80).

Women can be targeted for having gained economic independence from men, for having been employed in ‘male’ roles, or for having adopted urban and educated lifestyles in predominantly rural societies. There are calls for them to be forced ‘back’ into kitchens and fields, even if they were not thus occupied in these areas before the war (Cockburn, 2004: 40). It is sometimes unclear whether these are spontaneous reactions from individual men, or