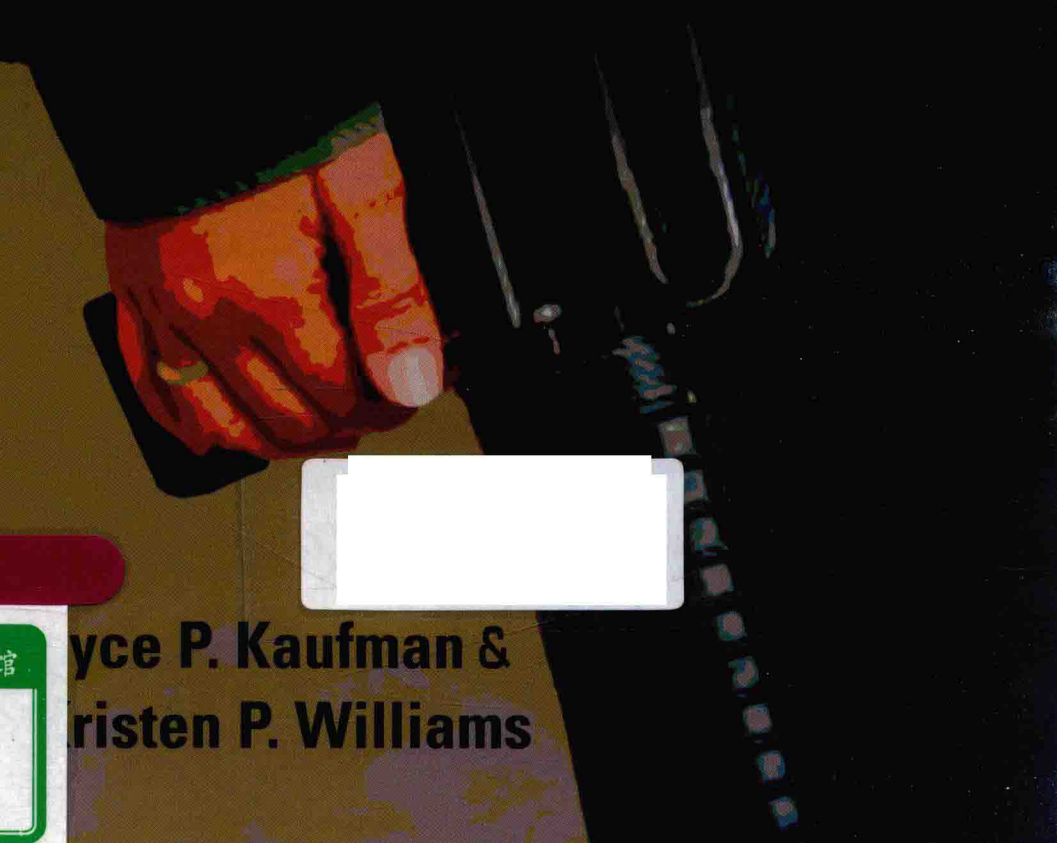


Women at War, Women Building Peace

CHALLENGING GENDER NORMS



by
Ayce P. Kaufman &
Kristen P. Williams

WOMEN AT WAR,

WOMEN BUILDING PEACE

Challenging Gender Norms

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Kristen P. Williams

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Women at War, Women Building Peace

Preface

When sleeping women wake, mountains move.
—Chinese proverb

WAR AND CONFLICT, INTERSTATE AND INTRASTATE, REMAIN EVER PRESENT IN THE twenty-first century. The stories of war—who participates in them, who is affected by them and how—are important to know. Often, these stories of war are gendered in that they are about men as soldiers. When looking at war's impact on women, the stories are about women as victims, as refugees, and their experiences with sexual violence. Yet, women are not just victims, they are also peace activists, they are supporters of war, and they are combatants. In short, like men, women play many and varied roles during war and conflict.

Building on our previous work in which we examined the impact of war on women's citizenship, and particularly ethnically mixed marriages as well as women's peace activism, this book addresses women's political activism in times of conflict. By political activism, we mean the range of actions women take in responding to conflict and war in their societies, which include engaging in peace activism, nonviolent resistance in support of one side of a conflict, and becoming armed combatants and even suicide bombers or martyrs. Along this continuum of political activism, women demonstrate their agency to act. While their agency is constrained

by the patriarchal structures (political, economic, cultural, and social) of their societies, they are still able to engage in political activism. We demonstrate women's political activism along the continuum in three case studies: Northern Ireland, Israel-Palestine, and Sri Lanka. What we find is that in all three cases women were indeed political actors at informal and formal political levels, although the challenge of entering the formal political sphere was formidable. We also find that women's political activism during conflict must continue in the postconflict period for a state or society to recover successfully from war and begin the difficult work of reconstruction and peacebuilding.

We are grateful to the two anonymous reviewers whose comments and suggestions strengthened the book significantly, and we are also thankful to the discussants at the annual conferences of the American Political Science Association and International Studies Association for their comments on earlier drafts of this book. We benefited from our experience at a presentation on women combatants, which we gave at USAID in Washington, DC, in June 2011. Our work was also enhanced greatly by Kristen's academic study visit to Israel in January 2012 and invitations to give presentations in Jerusalem and Ramallah, Palestine. Our thanks go to Galia Press-Barnathan, at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, and to Nader Said, president of the Arab World for Research and Development in Ramallah. In both venues, the audience members asked invaluable questions and provided comments and suggestions that strengthened our understanding of Israeli and Palestinian women's political activism in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Joyce's visits to Northern Ireland were again important in enhancing this research. Conversations with Kieran McEvoy and Carmel Roulston were especially helpful for the insight they offered about the role of women. Research at the Linen Hall Library in Belfast enabled us to draw upon newspapers that publicly documented acts of political violence perpetrated by women during the difficult time of the Troubles, and they provided important context, as did some of the primary sources, such as diaries of the women who were imprisoned, which were made available to us. Special thanks once again to Ross Moore for his assistance in locating these documents. We also extend our appreciation to two of our students, Emilie Blechman (Whittier College) and Oana Chimina (Clark University), who assisted us in the research for this book.

We also reserve very special thanks for Jim Lance, our editor at Kumarian Press. This is our second book with him, and we are very appreciative of the support he has given to both of these projects. In noting this,

we are grateful to Kumarian Press for permission to reproduce portions of chapters from *Women and War: Gender Identity and Activism in Times of Conflict* (2010). Thanks also go to our production editor, Alexandra Hartnett, and to Jennifer Kern, marketing representative at Kumarian, for their work on getting this book through the production process and out to the wider world. Their excellent work notwithstanding, any errors or omissions are our responsibility.

Finally, we dedicate this book to our families for their support and encouragement as we continue on our joint academic journey of exploring and understanding women and gender in international relations, in times of war and in times of peace. Women's voices matter, and we hope that with this book we have made a contribution, however small, to making those voices heard.

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1

Challenging Gender Norms

GENDER NORMS, OR GENDER-BASED EXPECTATIONS, OF WOMEN'S BEHAVIOR include such descriptors as nurturing, caregiving, and peaceful. In cases of interstate and intrastate conflicts, women often engage in peace activism, such as protests, silent vigils, public speeches, and political and economic boycotts.¹ In doing so, women's actions reinforce gender norms, yet peace activism can also be seen as a challenge to gender norms as women move from the perceived private sphere of the home (women's domain) into the public sphere (men's domain). For example, the feminist network Women in Black, which began in Israel as a response to the first intifada, holds silent vigils in public spaces to protest "against any manifestation of violence, militarism or war."² This very public display of women's political activism can be seen as challenging existing gender norms.

At the same time, women also serve as combatants, participating in state-sanctioned violence (as members of militaries) as well as non-state-sanctioned violence (members of rebel groups, paramilitary organizations, and militias, and as suicide bombers). This form of political activism—as combatants rather than as peacemakers—challenges gender norms about women's "proper" roles and behavior. A plethora of headlines relatively recently has raised attention to the role of women as active participants in ongoing conflicts. For example, in July 2008 the front page of the *New York Times* ran a story titled "Despair Drives Suicide Attacks by Iraqi Women."³ What was especially striking about the story was not the fact that the woman identified was the eighteenth female suicide bomber to

strike in Diyala province. Rather, the emphasis was on the question of why women in this relatively conservative society are resorting to a type of violence traditionally associated with men. In yet another case, in March 2010 two female suicide bombers were identified as having carried out the deadly attacks on a Moscow subway. Again, the headline is telling: "Russia Says Suicide Bomber Was Militant's Widow."⁴ The picture that accompanied the story was of the young woman, seventeen years old, posing with her husband, "a 30-year-old militant leader who lured her from her single mother, drew her into fundamentalist Islam and married her. He was killed by federal forces in December, driving her to seek revenge."⁵ The second suicide bomber was "a 28-year-old teacher from a predominantly Muslim region of southern Russia who was married to an extremist leader."⁶

Both of these stories attribute the women's actions in part to their being "lured" by men who drew them into fundamentalism. According to this interpretation, when the men were killed, the women became suicide bombers as a way to get revenge. This depiction suggests that the women's actions were not the result of the choices they made but of decisions made for them by their spouses. While it is true that many suicide bombers, men and women, are motivated by a desire to avenge the death of a loved one, in this case the articles overlook the fact that women *chose* this path and that these women acted for political reasons. Thus, what is surprising is not that some women are turning to suicide bombing as a means of political expression, but rather why so little attention has been given to the role of women who engage in political violence. Using violence as a means of political action or activism is not a new option for women. It is one way in which women who live in circumstances of political violence can express agency. In fact, politically violent action is a way women can engage in politics.

In responding to situations of conflict and war, women have a number of strategies available to them, including becoming politically active to help resolve the conflict through peace activism, becoming actively engaged in support of conflict through nonviolent resistance, engaging in violence in support of the conflict as combatants or even as suicide bombers, or becoming refugees or internally displaced persons. Importantly, these are not mutually exclusive categories. We consider women's responses to conflict and war a form of political activism, which can be considered as taking place along a *continuum of political activism/action*. In this way, there is not a binary of peace and violence, or peace activism and political violence, per se, but a range of actions available to women.

One way women can engage in peace activism is at the local grass-roots level in their communities. An example of this is Women in Black in Israel noted earlier. Women's activism in this group is focused on nonviolent action, such as protests, vigils, public speeches, and boycotts. Women can also engage in peace activism through participation in the formal political system, such as the creation of political parties. The Northern Ireland Women's Coalition is one such example. This political party was created to cross communal lines of Protestant/Unionists/Loyalists and Catholics/Nationalists/Republicans to have a voice at the peace negotiations that led to the 1998 Good Friday Agreement to end the conflict in Northern Ireland.

Our previous work looked at women's decisions to work for peace as a conscious choice and form of political activism, sometimes driven by feminist goals (defined as promoting political, social, and economic equality of women and men, and overturning patriarchal political, economic, and social structures) and sometimes by more traditional values (specifically a wife or mother who wants peace in her community). In most cases, the primarily male patriarchal structure of political decision making excluded women from the initial decisions to engage in some form of political violence. Women respond to that situation as political actors—working for peace is one of those strategies.⁷

Yet, as demonstrated by the examples of the suicide bombers in Iraq and Russia noted at the beginning of this chapter, women also choose to engage in political activism in support of conflict and war, again along that continuum: participating in boycotts and protests, conducting surveillance, storing and transporting weapons, and becoming armed combatants and even suicide bombers. In essence, resistance and struggle come in various forms, from nonviolent resistance to overt violence, whether that violence is conducted by the state or by anti-state/nationalist/liberation movements. Moreover, evidence from a range of asymmetric conflicts shows that nonviolent resistance is very rarely only that; rather, as Veronique Dudouet argues, "In most cases, NVR [nonviolent resistance] has been used to various degrees in combination with more classical styles of asymmetric struggle." Examples abound: the African National Congress in South Africa in its struggle to overthrow Apartheid, ethnic Albanians in Kosovo seeking independence from Serbia, and Palestinians seeking to end the occupation in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.⁸

In this book, we explore cases of women's political activism as an act of political agency during civil or intrastate conflicts (we do not examine interstate wars). Some women choose to work for peace as a way to gain some sense of control over a situation of internal conflict or war, a decision

that most were not involved in making, while others clearly opt to support one side or the other in a political and military struggle whether in support of the state or the nationalist/liberation/self-determination movement. (Note that we are not going to address here the circumstances of women who were forced to participate in political violence through coercive means. The very nature of those circumstances means that women did not have choices; we are interested in the decisions women make.) Consequently, our research questions are as follows: (1) *Why* do some women get involved in political activism of any kind (this refers to women's motivations)? (2) *How* do they become involved in political activism (e.g., are they actively recruited by family and friends? Do they join on their own?); and (3) So what? Why does studying women and women's political activism matter?

We use a gender analysis to understand the why and how of women's political activism in times of conflict and war. This book contributes to the scholarship on women and conflict in a number of ways. Our work is synthetic and draws on existing research to elucidate what we think are some important points about women's decisions to engage in political activism. A great body of research looks at women working for peace, generally and in specific cases, such as in the former Yugoslavia and Israel-Palestine.⁹ There are also significant works on women engaging in political violence. For example, the work of Laura Sjoberg and Caron Gentry, Paige Whaley Eager, and Mia Bloom all focus on women and political violence, and they illustrate their arguments with case studies, including Chechnya and Rwanda.¹⁰ A good number of edited volumes address women and political violence from different theoretical and regional or geographical perspectives.¹¹ Other volumes focus specifically on women suicide bombers, such as the work of Bloom, but also Barbara Victor and Rosemarie Skaine.¹² And other work looks at women as combatants in specific regional or geographic cases, such as that of Miranda Alison (Sri Lanka and Northern Ireland) and Sandra McEvoy (Northern Ireland).¹³

All this is instructive and important research and has been valuable to us as we examine women as political actors responding to conflict. However, in the course of our own work we realized there is a dearth of information that looks at both sides of the issue, that is, why some women choose to work for peace and other women support and engage in conflict, in the same case being studied. Drawing on and synthesizing this research, which looks at one side and the other, will enable us to make an important contribution by allowing us to answer questions about women's choices and decisions regarding situations of civil conflict.

In drawing on the research of others, we are indebted to the qualitative data they have acquired through fieldwork, interviews, testimonials, and so forth, all of which are in line with feminist research methodology. In addition to using secondary sources, we have used primary sources in one of our cases, primarily archival work and interviews in Northern Ireland.¹⁴ Primary and secondary sources enable us to explore and analyze women's motivations and how they became involved in political activism. We recognize the limitations of drawing conclusions from small-*N* studies, as the qualitative data we cite from the various sources were small numbers of interviews with women. However, this does not negate the findings about women's activism. Women's stories can tell us much about women, gender, and international relations (IR).

The third research question we pose is: So what? Why does studying women and women's political activism matter? This question really gets to the heart of the research in this book. Studying women matters because mainstream IR theories tend to omit women and gender from their analysis of war and peace. Women are everywhere in the world; they are not invisible, and they are affected by wars and conflict. They are also affected by peace. Moreover, studying women matters because women organize *as women* to form women's movements engaged in political activism (one can think of women's organizations dedicated to peace activism but also others, such as all-women militias). This does not mean that all women are the same or they have the same issues and interests. What an exploration and understanding of women's activist organizations can do is recognize, as S. Laurel Weldon demonstrates in her work on women's activist organizations in democracies, that

claiming that women's organizations represent women as women does not imply that women share an identity or that they share all their interests as women. It merely suggests that women confront some similar issues as women. The system or set of women's organizations can be thought of as a mechanism for articulating women's perspective. . . . There is considerable ideological, racial, class, and other diversity across women's groups, but they focus on a set of overlapping issues that can be thought of as reflecting the social position of women. When women's groups raise these issues for discussion, they provide some representation for women. Again, this account focuses on women's organizations *taken as a group*. It does not claim that any particular organization represents or could represent all women (italics in the original).¹⁵

In this book we will focus on exploring the motivations for women's political activism and the discourses of political activism. In terms of the

motivations for women's political activism, we are interested in the questions of why and how women engage in such activism. What motivates some women to engage in peace activism, nonviolent resistance, and violence? At the same time, we are also interested in the gender discourse surrounding women's political activism. The discourse surrounding women and war is that women are by nature peaceful, while men are aggressive and prone to war. Men are the protectors, and women are the protected. These are essentialist assumptions—that women's peaceful natural disposition is because of their biology, given their childbearing capacity, and they need to be protected by men. When it comes to women engaging in political violence, Sjoberg and Gentry show “that gender discourses dominate today's increasing recognition of and concern for women's violence. In these gendered discourses, deviant women are set up in opposition to idealized gender stereotypes. They are characterized as the exception to clearly understood gender norms.”¹⁶ Thus, when women's violence in the international arena is discussed, “traditional gender norms remain intact and thriving.”¹⁷ Moreover, when discussing terrorists, warriors, and criminals, the word *women* is used as an adjective that describes the noun. Sjoberg and Gentry assert, “Because women who commit these violences have acted outside of a prescribed gender role, they have to be separated from the main/malestream discourse of their particular behaviour.”¹⁸

Given our overview of the preceding research questions and the importance of gender norms and gender discourses, in the sections that follow we discuss feminist security theory (FST) as a theoretical framework for exploring and analyzing women's political activism in times of conflict and war. We then address the topics of agency and intersectionality, followed by the concluding section, which provides an overview of the subsequent chapters of the book.

FST: Women, Gender, and Security

Traditional, or mainstream, IR theory addresses issues such as war and conflict, peace, international political economy, and state building and national security. For example, realism, particularly its neo- or structural realist variant, looks at the anarchic international system with no world government, the distribution of material power, and a system in which states are concerned about their power relative to others.¹⁹

In a realist world, gender (and women, for that matter) is not addressed. As J. Ann Tickner notes, “Characteristics associated with femininity are

considered a liability when dealing with the realities of international politics." She further asserts, "When realists write about national security, they often do so in abstract and depersonalized terms, yet they are constructing a discourse shaped out of these gendered identities."²⁰ Pioneering feminist scholars, such as Cynthia Enloe, asked the question when looking at international politics: "Where are the women?"²¹ Feminist IR scholars rightly point out that the omission of women and gender in any analysis of issues relevant to IR leaves us with an incomplete understanding of those issues.²² And when the big issues of mainstream IR such as conflict and peace negotiations are addressed along with any exploration of women as related to those issues, they are most likely done so in very gendered terms: women as victims, women as peacemakers, and women as pacifists. Within this gender order, femininity and women are subordinated to masculinity and men.²³ Mainstream security studies tend to conflate *women* with *gender*. In doing so, as Sa'ar, Sachs, and Aharoni argue, "Men and masculinity [are left] entirely outside the explanatory frame."²⁴ Using women or gender "as a strictly descriptive attribute" runs the risk of using "essentialist explanations of emotional predispositions and cultural roles." Moreover, "gender as an *analytical* category" is called for by a feminist approach, an approach that "treats the attributes woman/man as historically contingent, rather than as predetermined facts."²⁵ Consequently, in employing a gender analysis, feminist IR scholarship serves as a challenge to traditional IR to examine the ways "gender differences permeate all facets of public and private life."²⁶

We begin with the assertion, as argued by feminist scholars, that assumptions about women's *correct* or *appropriate* behavior are socially constructed where women are assumed to be nurturing, caring, and peaceful. This has contributed to the stereotyping that genders the state and citizenship. As the modern state developed in the West in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, participation in the public sphere—the polity—was limited. Only men were allowed to participate. Women were expected to remain in the domestic/private sphere of the home. Moreover, given that the modern state was born from war, according to Charles Tilly, the military was critical to the success and existence of the state.²⁷ Men are the warriors, women are the protected. And thus, from a very broad IR perspective, the concept of security was, and is, tied to the need to protect the nation-state and the people who live within its borders. Men fight wars to protect innocent civilians—women and children (often used in the same phrase). Yet, as Laura Sjoberg and Jessica Peet show, a "protection racket" is at play: "Women are promised protection from wars by men

who then take credit for protecting them, while not actually doing so.”²⁸ Instead, the civilian immunity principle—in which civilians are not to be targeted in times of war and conflict—actually does not protect women. Rather, as Sjoberg and Peet assert, “When feminists argue that ‘men’ protect ‘women’ in war, they mean that ‘masculinity’ protects ‘femininity’ ideationally, whether or not men (or anyone else) protects women (or anyone else) in real material terms.”²⁹ Additionally, as Catia Confortini states, “The links between military service, citizenship, and the modern state establish a connection between violence, citizenship, and hegemonic masculinity, so that all depend upon each other for permanence and recreation. The capacity or potential for violence is then indissolubly associated with citizenship and the state through an appeal to ‘manliness.’”³⁰ In the end, as Sjoberg and Peet claim, “Women’s need for protection justifies wars, but it also justifies the social dominance of masculinity, a requirement for war-fighting.”³¹

In thinking about gender and security, feminist IR scholars argue that “gender as a power relation” helps us to understand these concepts more clearly, particularly in understanding gender subordination.³² In terms of feminist scholarship, no single feminist theory exists. Rather, there are a variety of feminist approaches to security, including liberal feminism, critical feminism, feminist constructivism, feminist post-structuralism, and postcolonial feminism. While the various feminist approaches apply an analysis of women and gender differently, all use gender as a tool of analysis.³³ Moreover, in the IR security subdiscipline of feminist security studies, there are different voices speaking to and about gender and international relations.³⁴ Some feminist security studies scholars argue for engagement with the mainstream IR literature, while others call for a separation, as they are skeptical that the mainstream IR literature will take gender and women seriously in analyses of IR topics.³⁵

While different feminist approaches to security do exist, they do make, as Eric Blanchard asserts, “at least four theoretical moves. First, IR feminists question the supposed nonexistence and irrelevance of women in international security politics, engendering or exposing the workings of gender and power in international relations.”³⁶ Second, feminist security theory (FST) interrogates the claim that the state actually ensures women’s “protection” in times of war and peace.³⁷ Third, FST questions the discourses that equate women with peace, men with violence. Finally, FST has “started to develop a variegated concept of masculinity to help explain security.”³⁸ In the end, as Jennifer K. Lobasz and Laura Sjoberg remark, “Feminist work addressing security has pointed out gender’s key role,

conceptually, in understanding security; *empirically*, in seeing causes and predicting outcomes; *normatively*, in understanding what is good and bad about security practices; and *prescriptively*, in terms of looking to solve the world's most serious security problems" (italics added).³⁹

FST, therefore, argues that "hegemonic understandings of security systematically overlook the practical experiences of insecurity among members of marginalized groups, and among women across the entire social spectrum. . . . Instead of a narrow focus on injuries caused by armed forces and militias, FST argues for much broader definitions that would include injuries perpetrated in the domestic sphere and legitimated by militaristic and patriarchal norms, as well as by the proliferation of arms."⁴⁰ In fact, according to Sa'ar et al., FST broadens the definition of security to include "economic development, social justice and emancipation."⁴¹ Thus, in thinking of security as a concept, one must recognize that how security is understood has changed in the sense that it not only relates to traditional military concerns of states but to issues now considered "human security": environmental issues, economic issues in light of globalization, spread of infectious diseases, and human rights, to name a few.⁴²

As feminist security theorists repeatedly demonstrate, conflict and war affect the personal security of civilians. The rules of engagement as well as the battlefield's parameters have changed in such a way that the personal security of civilians, namely, women and children, is undermined. These conflicts have also threatened women's physical security: rape is a tool of war and domestic violence in the home, as domestic violence is connected to social or state-sponsored violence. Tickner asserts, "Feminist perspectives on security would assume that violence, whether it be in the international, national, or family realm, is interconnected. Family violence must be seen in the context of wider power relations."⁴³ The types of conflicts in the contemporary period—intrastate civil wars—have negatively affected women's physical security. Moreover, in times of war, women as civilians are targeted, regardless of the civilian immunity principle, because "insomuch as women are indicators, signifiers, and reproducers of state/nation, belligerents attack *women* to attack the essence of state/nation" (italics in the original).⁴⁴

Women, Structural Violence, and Peace

In thinking of women's security, one can also consider structural violence, a concept first introduced by Johann Galtung. Structural violence refers to a situation in which "violence is built into the structure and shows up as