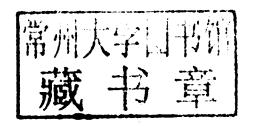# Women and War

*Gender Identity and Activism
in Times of Conflict*

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Preface

This book is part of an intellectual journey that began in 2000 when we both attended a lecture given by Cynthia Enloe at the University of Southern California in which she admonished the audience to ask ourselves where the women appear in our own research or were they, in fact, invisible. That starting point led to a number of discussions about the absence of women in the work each of us was then doing about the breakup of the former Yugoslavia. Upon realizing that neither of us addressed women within our research, we decided to begin a collaboration in which we examined the impact of the wars in Yugoslavia on women in ethnically mixed marriages, a topic that we both found interesting and that was tied to, although on the fringes of, the work that we were then doing.

That first project grew into a journal article and previous book, and then this research, which grew out of a series of questions that emerged when we explored citizenship and nationalism and the ways in which these become gendered concepts. One of our major areas of interest in that earlier research was to understand the ways in which women become politicized and how that political activism is manifested, especially in societies in conflict. In the course of looking at the four cases that we studied—the United States, former Yugoslavia, Israel/Palestine, and Northern Ireland—we came to some interesting conclusions that led us to ask the question of what happened to the women? In effect, what we saw was that although war and conflict affect women directly, they are generally removed from the decisions that lead to political violence. Yet, they are also significantly affected by conflict and war. In doing the research, we also discovered that even though women were instrumental in working for peace, they often did not enter the formal political structure after the end of the conflict, whether by choice or omission. And this led us to ask why that was the case. Hence, in this book we look at the broad question of what happened to the women: how they were affected during conflict, how they chose to respond politically to their situation, and their status and place when the conflict finally ended.

It is important that we put forward a disclaimer here: as both of us had been trained in traditional international relations, we entered the research about women and gender from that perspective which, we think, gives us a different viewpoint in understanding and writing about women and conflict, including women's

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contributions to conflict resolution and peacemaking. We think that this book sits firmly at the intersection of traditional and feminist international relations (IR) perspectives. We draw heavily on both the traditional literature and feminist IR theory, which, together provide insights into the gendered notion of the state and decision-making as well as about conflict and conflict resolution.

As we continued the intellectual journey that has led us to this volume, we have sought the advice and counsel of a number of people who have been invaluable sources of support, ideas, and inspiration. Chief among these are J. Ann Tickner, Laura Sjoberg and Cynthia Enloe, all of whom understand our perspectives in approaching this work, and have continually encouraged us to go forward. We also thank a number of people for their valuable comments on earlier versions of this manuscript in the form of conference papers, as well as feedback on individual pieces of this research: Kristyna K. Mullen, Helle L. Rytkonen, and two anonymous reviewers at Kumarian Press.

This research benefited greatly from Joyce Kaufman's trips to Northern Ireland for the purposes of doing interviews as well as archival research. The latter was done at the Linen Hall Library in Belfast, the repository for many of the important political papers documenting the troubles. Yvonne Murphey, the director of development and librarian, Northern Ireland Political Collection, allowed Joyce to have access to the papers of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition (NIWC), which had not even been archived formally when she was there in June 2008. Alistair Gordon and especially Ross Moore helped sort through the many documents; Ross was especially helpful in trekking up and down stairs with boxes that provided great insight into the NIWC, including the deliberation surrounding its decisions to disband. The countless hours of interviews with women who were directly involved with some aspect of politics in Northern Ireland provided insight that would otherwise have been impossible for someone outside the country. Carmel Roulston, who helped make introductions to many of those women, was once again an important resource. But it was their willingness to give of their time that we especially appreciate. Among those women were Bronagh Hinds, "Catherine," Patricia Lewsley, Jane Morrice, and Margaret Ward. Special thanks to May Da Silva and the group from Women Into Politics who allowed Joyce to participate in the International Women's Peace Conference, Peace by Piece, in Belfast in June 2008. Listening to and being able to exchange ideas with the participants in this conference was a rich and rewarding experience. Also in Belfast, thanks to Audrey, Clare, and Rob, all of whom are or were involved with some aspect of sports and physical activity at the community level, for their insights. They each brought another dimension to an understanding of the Troubles and the divisions in Northern Ireland. Joyce also gives her deepest personal thanks to Joe and Francis and the family for their hospitality during the many visits to Northern Ireland as well as for facilitating a number of contacts. She will never forget the informal concert the family gave at their home one evening,

or the promise made during the first visit in 1999 to look into and try to understand more about the Troubles. We hope that this book helps fulfill that promise.

In London, a personal meeting with Cynthia Cockburn was extremely helpful, and we appreciate her time and feedback on our ideas. We also want to thank the staff at The Women's Library of London Metropolitan University for helping Joyce negotiate its archives as well. Although we are both political scientists and not historians, we understand and appreciate the value of primary-source research.

Much of Joyce's travel for purposes of this research would not have been possible without important sources of financial support. In 2007 she was awarded a Small Research Grant from the American Political Science Association to fund some of the travel to Northern Ireland. This was augmented by a Faculty Research Grant awarded by Whittier College; she is grateful to her colleagues for their support of this endeavor. Some of the time spent traveling and writing was made possible because of a sabbatical leave in fall 2007. This, too, would not have been possible without the support of the dean, Susan Gotsch, and especially Ria O'Foghludha, for her willingness to step in and serve as acting director of the Whittier Scholars Program during that semester, thereby relieving Joyce of her administrative responsibilities so that she could travel and write.

Two students, Leslie King (Whittier College, '09) and Deyla Curtis (Whittier College, '12) were instrumental in helping to track down sources and documenting the bibliography. Their help was invaluable, and we appreciate it.

We are also grateful to Lexington Books (an imprint of Rowman and Littlefield Publishers) for granting us permission to reproduce material from *Women, the State, and War* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2007).

We owe special thanks to Jim Lance, our editor at Kumarian Press, who has supported this research every step of the way, from our first conversation at an annual International Studies Association meeting in 2007. He has been nothing but helpful and supportive, even when deadlines slipped a bit. Thanks also go to Erica Flock, our production editor at Kumarian Press, who has been incredibly patient with our queries as we moved the book through the production process. As always, even with all the competent and qualified people who read and reviewed all or parts of this volume, any errors or omissions are our responsibility.

No preface or acknowledgments would be complete without thanking our families for their support and encouragement through this next step of our intellectual journey. Joyce Kaufman owes a debt of gratitude to her husband, Robert B. Marks, who accompanied her to Northern Ireland and provided another set of eyes and ears that helped interpret much of what we saw during our many visits. Kristen Williams thanks her husband, James, and children, Anne and Matthew, for their patience and understanding of the time and energy it takes to complete a book.

We dedicate this book to our families and friends, who helped us through this process, but especially, to the women!

Acronyms

ANC	African National Congress
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
FMLN	Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (El Salvador)
ICTY	International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia
IR	international relations
LTTE	Tamil Tigers (Sri Lanka)
LWI	Liberian Women's Initiative
NIWC	Northern Ireland Women's Coalition
NMA	Naga Mothers' Association
NWUM	Naga Women's Union of Manipur
PLO	Palestinian Liberation Organization
SPLM/A	Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UN Action	United Nations Action Against Sexual Violence in Conflict
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees

Women and War

Contents

Chapter 1

Introduction

Women have long struggled with issues of citizenship, identity, and the challenge of being recognized as equal members of the society. The same society that values and reveres women as symbols used to create national identity ("mother country") as well as for their responsibility for producing the next generation also diminishes or minimizes the role that they play as productive contributors to the society. This duality that surrounds the perception of women is often exaggerated in times of war and conflict where the symbolism—or myths—of womanhood are essential to the very survival of the country. Yet the political reality is such that the decisions regarding war and conflict are generally made by men within the political system from which women are excluded.

The patriarchal nature of most social and political systems often provides barriers to women's involvement in the formal political process, a place in which women could effect significant change. Women frequently are imbued with essentialist characteristics such as peaceful and collaborative, which could be beneficial to the political system under any set of circumstances. At the same time, women are blocked from participating in the political processes that could bring about peace in times of conflict, or that could alter the structure of the system that resulted in the conflict initially.

This leads to a series of questions regarding the political options that are available to women who are affected by conflicts but who are also removed from the political decision-making process that led to the conflict in the first place. Depending on the circumstances, women have four major options for responding to situations of conflict: (1) do nothing, (2) become politically active to help resolve the conflict, (3) actively participate in the conflict as belligerents engaged in violence, or (4) flee the fighting as refugees. Regardless of which option ultimately is selected, women are forced to deal with the situation in some way that requires a conscious choice. And in responding, women have agency.

For this research our primary questions pertain to the ways in which women interact with and then react to the political processes and decisions that affect them

at various stages from before the onset of conflict, to the conflict situation, and then the process of conflict resolution and the peacebuilding that follows (in this book we focus on internal/intrastate rather than interstate conflicts). Underlying these series of questions are a number of other equally important questions about women's political activism, specifically what prompts women to take political action at various stages of a conflict, what types of actions they take, and how they can—and do—have an impact when the reality is that, for the most part, they are excluded from political decision-making and mainstream avenues of political power. In this research our focus is primarily on option two of women's possible responses, specifically, women who choose to become politically active in such a way as to help resolve the conflict and then work toward the reconstruction of the post-conflict society.

The central question that has guided the creation of this research is, What happened to the women? We mean that in a number of different ways. What happened to women as a society was building toward war, often something that women can see yet are powerless to stop because of their exclusion from the centers of decision-making? What happens to women during conflict, and how do they react to and cope with situations of conflict? What happened to women during the process of conflict resolution? Do women participate? Do they get seats at the negotiating table? Can and do they make a difference? And, perhaps our most important question, what happened to these same women who engaged in political action specifically to resolve the conflict or for peace during situations of conflict after the violence ends? Do they become part of the system that had previously excluded them? Or do they remain outside the formal political system either by choice or because of structural constraints, or both?

Before we can begin to answer the questions surrounding what happened to the women, it is important to understand the genesis of them. In an earlier book[1] we explored questions about citizenship and nationalism, and the ways in which these become gendered concepts. Major areas of interest were to understand the ways in which women become politicized and how that political activism is manifested, especially in societies in conflict. In the course of looking at the four cases that we studied—the United States, former Yugoslavia, Israel/Palestine, and Northern Ireland—we came to some interesting conclusions that led us to ask, What happened to the women? In effect, what we saw was that although war and conflict affect women directly, they are generally removed from the decisions that lead to political violence. Yet, they are also affected by conflict and war in ways that are different from men who are engaged in the actual fighting. For example, women experience sexual violence such as rape and forced pregnancy, widowhood and becoming heads of household, all of which are largely unique to women.

As a country moves toward war, whether interstate or intrastate, the social and political structure changes, as do the economic priorities, all of which have a direct

effect on women. In fact, as a government begins to make the "guns and butter" economic trade-offs that are necessary for a society at war, the social safety net upon which many women depend is removed, leaving them vulnerable while also relatively politically powerless. Cynthia Cockburn notes that the militarization of society "is accompanied by high expenditure on arms." The expenditure on weapons "is often at the expense of spending on public services, including health and education."[2] This is quantifiable and is something that the "average" citizen would notice and experience. Furthermore, these costs are usually borne by women long before war breaks out. According to Jodi York, "Poor women pay it [the costs of conflict] daily when governments divert funds from social services that benefit the poor to defense spending. . . . Since the poor are predominantly women and children, it is from their mouths that social spending is diverted to feed war-making capabilities."[3] Given the economic impact that conflict situations and even the pre-conflict buildup have on women, the question remains what can—or what do—women do to address this?

Similarly, as women work in the community and talk to their neighbors, they are perhaps more sensitive to the changes between or among groups that could escalate into ethnic, religious, or nationalist conflict. Yet, they have few options in addressing these changes. In fact, we could argue, it is women's ability to "dialogue across differences," in the words of Elisabeth Porter,[4] that makes them less willing to accept the notion of "the other"—which has contributed to the proliferation of ethnic and religious conflicts we have seen since the end of the Cold War—and more willing to work for peace.

Once conflict or war erupts within a country, and in this book we focus on internal conflicts rather than interstate conflicts, it is often women who take the lead in pushing for resolution of that conflict or moving the country toward a situation of peace. Research has shown that it is not that women are simply seeking an end to the conflict, but, in fact, that they want to see the post-conflict reconstruction of society address the structural issues that contributed to the outbreak of violence.[5] For women, seeking peace is not just about ending war; it is also about ensuring a system of social justice and equality, eliminating John Galtung's idea of "structural violence,"[6] so that further acts of political violence will be less likely in the future.

There has been a significant amount written about the impact of conflict on women, and we recognize the value of the work that has been and continues to be done in this area.[7] In this volume we draw on a rich body of work but focus specifically on the types of political activism that women engage in at various stages in order to make their voices heard specifically to resolve the conflict. It is important that we make the point here that in describing women's political activism or the ways in which they respond politically to situations of conflict we do not mean to suggest that women were or are passive victims of a situation thrust upon them,

although in some cases that might be the case. Rather, our starting assumption is that because women generally have limited input into political decision-making, any actions that they take will be *after* and generally in response to the larger political decisions that were made to engage in conflict at all. In fact, it is in the determination to take action, and in deciding upon the types of actions to engage in, that women gain political power and agency.[8] Or, as Haleh Afshar writes, "Conflicts can both empower and disempower women, since women can be at the same time included in practice and yet excluded ideologically, or they may be both victims and agents of change—though they often have no effective choice in these matters."[9] Women may opt to fight or take action, or they may choose to do nothing. Regardless of which they choose, they will not be untouched or unscathed by the conflict around them.

Similarly, although we generalize and refer to "women" throughout this book, we in no way assert that women are a monolithic group and that all women feel and respond the same ways. In fact, one of the criticisms leveled against mainstream or traditional international relations by feminist IR (international relations) theorists is exactly that: the tendency to generalize across "women" (when women are mentioned at all) thereby minimizing the impact of individual women or groups of women, and also distorting the range of positions that various women hold. Not only do we recognize these differences, but we value the range of opinions and points of view that women have. However, for purposes of our analysis, it is important to identify and generalize the most important strands of thought that women follow while also acknowledging that doing so cannot possibly capture the complexity of the reality.

As Inger Skjelsbaek describes feminism in her report on gendered battlefields: "The feminist activist movement fought for liberation for *all* women in the same manner. In order to achieve this it was important to portray women as a coherent group with similar qualities and problems. It was also important to show that women's interests were qualitatively different from those of men."[10] Hence, generalizing across groups of women becomes an important heuristic device that will allow us to draw important conclusions.

One of the critical decisions that women make is in determining the *type* of actions in which to engage: women supporting war, women opposed to war by virtue of their "motherist" position (that is, building on a more traditional, and essentialist, social role), and those opposed to war for overtly feminist reasons (who may also oppose war in their role as mothers). In the cases of women who opposed war and worked for peace, whether they were motivated by their traditional roles as wives or mothers or because as feminists they opposed the militaristic decisions made by male decision-makers, the immediate goal was the same, and that was to bring an end to the conflict. Yet one can also discern differences in long-term goals. Feminist activists seek to change the patriarchal structure of society and bring about

a more just and equal society after the conflict ends. We are interested in the ways women self-identified, and therefore we placed their actions into one of these categories. We are also interested in the *manner* in which women worked for peace. For example, did they work together to begin to facilitate support within their own community? Did they seek to influence the political system by trying to get elected and working within the system as the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition did in responding to the conflict between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland? Or did they remain outside the formal political process but seek to effect change by lobbying or bringing various forms of pressure to bear? And what did women want to accomplish beyond just ending the conflict?

Our earlier research led us to conclude that during conflict, although there are cases where women "clearly put their nationalist identity above gender identity, in many cases those women who were most politically active pursued an agenda that furthered gender identity."[11] In fact, there are numerous cases of women and women's groups who integrated positions that pertained to issues of gender as part of their campaign for peace. For example, initially founded in Israel in 1988 to protest Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, over time Women in Black broadened its agenda "to protest war, rape as a tool of war, ethnic cleansing, and human rights abuses all over the world."[12]

Conversely, Cockburn addresses the cases of women who elevate their national identity when she writes that "women cannot . . . claim clean hands in the matter of war. They often support belligerent movements." And she supports that claim with some very specific cases, such as "the entirely female elite battalion of suicide bombers of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam" in Sri Lanka who fought for independence for the Tamils. One of these female suicide bombers assassinated the Indian prime minister, Rajiv Gandhi, in 1991.[13] During the Bosnian War in the early 1990s, which pitted Serbs, Croats, and Muslims against one another, all female militias were also created based on women's national identities.[14]

Clearly, these examples illustrate the range of options open to women in deciding how to respond to or take action regarding their society in conflict. York makes another interesting point about the ways in which women can support war and conflict, albeit implicitly if not explicitly, through the roles that they play in many societies. Oftentimes, women might not see these actions as supporting the conflict as much as taking on important social roles. She notes that "women's support is as necessary to war as that of men; women serve as nurses, prostitutes, primary school teachers who glorify war and patriotic mothers who raise their sons to be soldiers."[15] One could even argue that women are necessary contributors to conflict and war while, at the same time, using many of those traditional roles to fight against it.

Our prior research indicates that during conflict, women often coalesce around a more traditional gender identity, allowing them to pursue issues "as wives" or as "mothers," identities seen as less threatening in a patriarchal structure already deeply

divided.[16] This does not preclude women political activists from taking positions and roles that are more overtly political. For example, in Northern Ireland, women were placed on government commissions, such as the Parades Commission and the District Policing Partnerships as well as the Human Rights Commission, all overtly political positions that allowed them to address broader political issues head on.[17] But those tend to be representative of a smaller number of cases than the number of women who joined together in opposition to conflict using a more traditional gender identity as the coalescing force as seen in Northern Ireland and in other countries as well.

Situations of conflict can also cause women to move beyond those traditional roles and take on new ones. As Donna Pankhurst notes, in some cases the circumstances of war and conflict resulted in "moments of liberation from the old social order. As the need arose for them [women] to take on men's roles in their absence, so they had to shake off the restrictions of their culture and live in a new way."[18] In fact, what this means is that whether they wanted to or not, women were often thrust from the private realm into the public, and many found it not only liberating but life changing. It is that political and social empowerment that can take place during conflict that emboldens women to take political action not only during the conflict but subsequently. In this way the binary divide between the private and public spheres is not so clear cut. Rather, the public versus private spheres are better understood as a continuum, with women crossing these spheres.[19]

The essentialist "motherist" position or reliance on a more traditional women's role has advantages for women who opt for political action in both the position it takes (bring an end to the conflict that is killing our husbands and children) and the representation or symbolism that goes with it. This is especially important given the symbolic roles that women often play in spurring a country, a society, or a particular group toward conflict, for example, fighting for the "mother country," or the recognition of "gold star mothers" who sacrifice one or more children for their country.[20] Who, within a society, could object to parents uniting against what many perceived as the unjust Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 (Parents Against Silence), or to the creation of a women's peace movement in Northern Ireland founded by two women "as a response to the deaths of three children struck by an IRA car, whose driver had been shot by an army patrol"?[21] Sanam Naraghi Anderlini's work shows that activists such as the Argentine Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo used their motherhood identity as a means to challenge the authoritarian government's policy of dealing with political dissent in which people "disappeared." A society and regime that espouses "motherhood as the ultimate virtue" faces difficulty in responding to such activism in a heavy-handed manner.[22] Thus, drawing on their common and traditional roles as women often allows groups to coalesce and bring attention to the need to end a conflict in a way that is not perceived as threatening—or is perceived as less threatening—to the dominant