Behind the Myth of Innocence:
Regendering the Violence of War

by
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INTRODUCTION

In October 2000, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 1325, calling for the "broad participation of women in peacebuilding, (and) post-conflict reconstruction." The resolution highlighted the increased targeting of women and children in war and "the need to increase their role in decision-making with regard to conflict prevention and resolution."[1] In discussions preceding the resolution's adoption, delegates implied that including women's perspectives in peace-building would not only enhance justice and equity, it would also contribute greatly to the success of peace efforts. Durga Prasad Bhattarai of Nepal's Permanent Mission to the UN, reflected the general tone of the speeches when he said that women tend to be "more sincere, more reliable, and more compassionate" than men, and "shunned violence more consistently."[2] UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan gave a glowing account of women's potential for peacework:

> Women, who knew the price of conflict so well, were also often better equipped than men to prevent it or solve it . . .. (They) had proved instrumental in 'building bridges rather than walls.' They had also been crucial in preserving social order when communities collapsed . . .. Yet their potential contribution to peace and security was still under-valued and they were still under-represented at the decision-making level.[3]

Clearly the time has come to seriously address the horrific targeting of civilians in war and to correct the inequities that exclude at least half of the adult population – women – from public decision-making.[4] Acknowledging the plight of civilians in war, "mainstreaming" a "gender perspective into peacekeeping operations" and empowering women to participate in peace-building may indeed assist these efforts and further human rights goals of justice and equity. However, assumptions underlying these positive moves need to be clarified. Are efforts to

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include women as equal partners in peace-building based on criteria of justice and equity, or on dubious assumptions about gender and "natural" propensities toward violence or peacemaking?

A number of feminist scholars, particularly those writing in the field of international relations, have provided many examples of women's support for violence and oppression.[5] Other feminists, such as Cynthia Enloe,[6] have examined why women support violence against other men, women, and children. This article does not attempt to add to those examples or further analysis of reasons why women support violence. Its aim is more modest, but I believe it fills a gap in the literature. It offers theoretical – and practical – explanations for the persistence of stereotypes of women as being naturally more peaceful, and more opposed to violence, than men, and of men as natural warriors. It also suggests peace-building opportunities that might arise from challenging these stereotypes.

After briefly reviewing some dominant discourses about women and war violence that appear in media, influential political documents, and writing from various feminist perspectives, and after presenting existing research that refutes claims that women are naturally peaceful, I argue that analysts may be blinded to women's support for violence and oppression for three reasons. The first reason is strategic. As the Security Council recognized, there is an urgent need to address the targeting of civilians in war. Women's and human rights organizations have worked hard to have crimes against civilians and gender-based crimes recognized as war crimes. They may fear that acknowledging women's support for violence would make their cause more ambiguous. Similarly, portraying women as less threatening than men opens strategic possibilities for grassroots peace-building in an environment of fear and distrust.

Second, most recent wars have taken place in societies with strongly divided gender roles. Most women's support for nationalist ideologies occurs within the private realm: the home and community. The conceptual division between the public (political) and private spheres renders the often gender-specific ways in which women support violence, chauvinism, and oppression, invisible.

Third, existing conceptualizations of violence blind us to ways in which women contribute to aggression. Categorizations of violence and of complicity in human rights violations provided by Johan Galtung and Heribert Adam respectively, provide us with a way of locating the blind spots in understanding citizens' involvement in war.

I argue that, while it is important to address inequalities, protect all civilians from war crimes, and tap all people's peace-building potential, basing such efforts on dubious notions of women's inherent capacity for peace – and, implicitly, men's preference for violence – is problematic.

The focus of this article is limited in four ways. First, its primary emphasis is on women's influence on war violence *within the private spheres of home*

and casual community. Women's more visible involvement in the public sphere – as high profile public figures like Margaret Thatcher and Madeline Albright; as suicide bombers in Israel, Sri Lanka, and India; or in military positions – has received some, though still inadequate, attention. These public and still exceptional roles may indicate what women are *capable of*,[7] but I am more interested in the common behavior of the majority of women in support of violence and oppression or peace, especially in times of crisis.

Second, because stereotypes about gender and war exist in many parts of the world, I am deliberately drawing from diverse contexts when I describe women's support for violence. However, I think my arguments apply best to conflicts between identity-based groups or between groups with different levels of social power. This is where women's prejudicial influence on children and other family and community members may be most strongly felt. In conflicts like the civil war in Sierra Leone, for example, which was not ethnically or religiously based and where the war divided communities in unforeseeable ways, women's involvement was far more complex and it is much more difficult to distinguish coerced from willing involvement in war violence.

Third, I am challenging stereotypes about women's support for violence in general. It is not my purpose to differentiate between justifications of violence, in the cause of "liberty" or supporting "oppression."

Finally, while I acknowledge that most women live within patriarchical societies, I view women as agents in their own right and see the kinds of actions which I will describe here as those of women acting on their own accord. Women, like all people, live in multiple hierarchical structures including gender, class, ethnicity, and age, and there is little evidence that they are any less likely to protect and abuse positions of privilege or power than men are.

The Discourses

> *History teaches us (the collective female 'we') that Beautiful Souls have not only succeeded in stopping the wounding and slaughter of sons, brothers, husbands, fathers, but have more often exhorted men to the task, sustained their efforts, honoured their deeds, mourned their loss. But history does not teach; rather we teach it by making it 'speak' to us in various ways, by remembering this and forgetting that.*[8]

In her thorough examination of discourses around women and war, Jean Elshtain[9] argues that traditionalists and feminist peace activists alike have contributed to the myth that, in relation to the violence of war, women are "Beautiful Souls": innocent and peaceful; and men are warriors: naturally aggressive and supportive of war. Justice and human rights institutions are also entrenched in this discourse.

When the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) issued its report on apartheid era crimes, it noted that almost all crimes were carried out by men and argued that the "cult of masculinity" contributed to the violence. In four pages that the five-volume report reserved for discussing women perpetrators much space was dedicated to wardens' acts of kindness toward prisoners. Yet the report acknowledged in passing that women worked as wardens and nurses in detention centres; many served in, and supported, a violent liberation struggle; and white women "supported the 'boys on the border' by sending them packages, by giving space to them in the media, and by otherwise 'egging them on.'"[10] In one brutal incident, women watched and applauded the rape of girls in a hostel, slapping them when they pleaded for intervention.[11] In contrast to its discussion of male perpetrators, however, the report fails to analyze women's support for, even embracing of, violence. The commission's mandate to investigate such direct acts of violence as "killing, abduction, torture and severe ill-treatment"[12] is insufficient to account for the authors' almost complete lack of interest in women's support for oppression and violence.

Western media coverage of conflicts also fails to mention women as actors in war or portrays them as victims. For example, until recently, *Globe and Mail* photographs of the conflict in the Palestinian territories, overwhelmingly show clichéd depictions of male violence – either Israeli soldiers or "Palestinian stone throwers." When a photograph of Palestinian women did appear,[13] women were standing behind a barred window. Questions about what Palestinian women think of the violence were rarely asked.[14] This only began to change when some Palestinian women became suicide bombers and Arab women turned out en mass in public demonstrations in countries like Egypt. Still, the *Christian Science Monitor* described these women as the "'New Arab woman' – one with a new-born conscience,"[15] as if women did not hold these political opinions and influence their families and communities until they acted publicly.

Similarly, a *Globe and Mail* article on the bombing of the US warship, *USS Cole*, in Yemen[16] reported that "Women were aboard the warship, one of the first in the U.S. Navy to carry a mixed crew, and . . . women were among the casualties." This privileging of female casualties reflects a common perception that women – even military personnel – are somehow more innocent in war, and therefore somehow their death or injury is more shocking.

Stereotypes of women as victims or peacemakers in war suit the interests of many feminists and women's and human rights organizations that struggle to highlight male violence against women and children both in war and peace. Some feminists have long argued that women are more peaceful than men and less inclined to support aggression against others. This perspective, which Joshua Goldstein calls "difference feminism," is discussed below.[17]

The 1931 Nobel Peace Prize winner, Jane Addams, wrote in 1916 of women's "imperative to preserve human life"[18] due to their nurturing roles

"which give them capacities and sensibilities desperately needed by the wider society."[19] More recently, in her 1989 book, *Feminist Perspectives on Peace and Peace Education*, Birgit Brock-Utne[20] argues that within the patriarchical societies that exist everywhere, "boys are educated for war and girls for peace. Girls are socialized into being friendly, caring about others and sharing resources, whereas boys are socialized into aggressive and competitive roles." Brock-Utne argues that, to promote peace, boys should be socialized more like girls, but this would necessitate changing the many patriarchical institutions, including the structure and nature of schools.[21]

Evelyn Henderson, addressing Brock-Utne's work, sums up this view when she writes:

No society that is lopsided because it is male-dominated can be truly just and equitable . . .. Women are peculiarly suited to the causes of peace: Creating peace-loving families, promoting social justice, developing human and healthy neighbourhoods, small and large. Women in power would be long on the peaceful resolution of conflict, and short on feeding their families into the jaws of war.[22]

Such authors, in their determination to empower women as peacebuilders, seem blind to the multiple hierarchies within every society and the many ways in which women advocate and support violence and oppression. As Parita Mukta writes:

Violent deeds perpetrated by women on men and women of the 'other' community, as well as on women in close familial relationships, appears to be a phenomenon which feminists find difficult to face at both a theoretical and programmatic level, raising as it does the question of women's complicity, agency and central positioning within processes and structures of violent configurations.[23]

Nationalist discourses about women and war, though also essentialist, differ somewhat from the discourses described above. Nationalist rhetoric is far from unified, but most nationalists view women as part of the struggle: as guardians and reproducers of the culture and producers of the next generation of soldiers. Women's sexuality is used both in nationalist competitions for population dominance and as a symbol of cultural purity. Nationalist propaganda often heralds the "purity" of "our women" and families, and denigrates the sexual mores of "enemy" women. In the former Yugoslavia, there was "widespread use of the violation of women as a propaganda tool to promote a nationalist agenda."[24] In conflicts in Bosnia, Iran, Israel, and North America during World War II, mothers were encouraged to stoically send their sons and husbands off to battle and reproduce a cultural narrative that justified the war – and they often did.[25] Nationalist discourses are Janus faced; they simultaneously see women as part of the war effort, and portray their "innocence" as proof of the enemy's barbarity.

Three Lines of Feminist Thought on Gender and War

When feminists and traditionalists assert that women are naturally (or socialized to be) peaceful and men are natural (or socialized) warriors or, somewhat differently, that men and women have different natural roles in war, they are making an ontological statement: that women and men are essentially different and that difference determines their inclination toward aggression and peace-building. In discussing feminist arguments, it is useful to locate these claims within a range of feminist approaches to gender and war. Goldstein differentiates between three feminist positions: liberal feminism, postmodern feminism, and difference feminism.[26]

Liberal feminists argue from an individual human rights perspective that women and men are equal in their ability to work effectively in all military roles. They claim that sexist discrimination is the main obstacle to women becoming soldiers. Liberal feminist scholars stress the experiences of women who have pursued non-traditional jobs – soldiers, political, and military leaders[27] – and argue that (sexist) mainstream media and academic writing has been blind to their accomplishments.

Postmodern feminists interested in war assert that gender is a socially constructed, arbitrary, and fluid notion. They stress that notions of femininity and masculinity in war differ between contexts and that men and women "play many roles in war, some of them seemingly contradictory."[28]

Difference feminists argue that for biological or cultural reasons, women and men have different abilities and different perspectives on war and peace-building. Drawing from women's traditional roles as mothers and nurturers, difference feminists assert that women "are generally more effective than men in conflict resolution and group decision-making, and less effective than men in combat."[29] Focusing their attention on women, writers like Addams and Brock-Utne see this as a positive difference and one that can be useful in peace-building. Goldstein also includes standpoint feminists in this category (women's position in relation to men enable them to identify and understand patriarchical structures within society better than men, to whom the power dynamics within these structures are largely invisible). He writes:

> Difference feminists advance two theoretical claims relevant to war: first, men are relatively violent and women relatively peaceable. Second, men are more autonomous and women more connected in their social relationships.[30]

Many of the claims being challenged in this article are coming from mainstream media, and governmental or UN documents reflecting liberal values and a liberal emphasis on human rights. Yet interestingly these liberal sources continue to entrench ideas of women being more peaceful or innocent in war, ideas which correspond with difference feminism. Consistent with the complexities

and contradictions highlighted by postmodern feminism, these sources may espouse liberal goals, such as a concern with equal rights for women in the military, while maintaining that women are inherently more peaceful than men.

Peace studies scholars, Goldstein observes, have been "more accepting of the assumptions behind difference feminism – that gender differences are real, that women are more peaceful – than have most scholars in women's or gender studies." Some peace studies feminists worry that critiquing "'essentialist assumptions' would open rifts that could weaken peace studies."[31]

Even feminist scholars writing about peace-building who do not subscribe to essentialist views *in effect* create a similar impression of gender differences through the selective lens of their writing. Cynthia Cockburn observes that only a minority of feminists hold essentialist views of gender. In contrast to Goldstein's definition of difference feminism, which includes culturally-derived differences, she describes essentialist feminists as those who believe that men and women are fundamentally shaped by biological differences. Most feminists, Cockburn argues, recognize:

> gender identities as socially constituted. From this perspective, when 'women' are invoked as collective social actor they are (like nation) an *imagined* community, a concept it is understood will take different shape in different minds, and be used for different purposes. And the blame for women's oppression then lies not with men 'being' men (natural-born rapists and killers) but with gender and other power relations.[32]

This kind of analysis, as much as Brock-Utne's, ignores the multiple hierarchies that we live in. As Annika Takala observes, conducting social analysis strictly through the lens of patriarchy "does not help in analysing the problems of any existing, real society . . .. Examples of male domination cannot be denied, but no actual society has ever been a true 'patriarchy' with all its features."[33]

Using a selective lens, Cockburn mentions in passing women's support for war but ultimately seems to excuse it away as a product of some other patriarchical phenomenon – for example, a desire to participate in work previously denied women; having little choice as their roles are defined for them in (patriarchical) nationalist movements (a passive construction reflected in Cockburn's statement above); or as shaped by a just nationalist (or liberation) cause. The focus then turns to women's victimization in war or their potential in building peace and challenging the patriarchical structures of war.

This selective lens is, in my opinion, as problematic as the essentialist claims of difference feminists. However, the selective and difference feminist approaches have some benefits for peace-building and protection of women and their dependents during war. As peace workers well know, there are real risks if women's roles in supporting war and oppression are acknowledged.[34] I will discuss these next.

Practical Advantages of the Myth of Women's Innocence

The myth of women's innocence in war serves two practical functions, one protective and the other a peace-building function. First, at a time when many militias adopt civilian dress, the myth tends to identify women as unquestioned civilians, which may offer them some protection in war and, by implication, continued care for their dependents. Peace scholars and peace workers may be concerned that recognizing women as potentially militarized subjects may provide militarized forces with a further excuse to target civilian women and may create an ambiguity for donors that may lead them to reduce funding.

This also means that once women civilians (and similarly children) cross the line from private (and thus publicly "invisible") support for war violence to collaboration or direct participation in the violence in civilian guise, all civilian women (and children) may become suspect. Female Palestinian suicide bombers, who are viewed by some as "'better bombers' because they are less likely to be suspected when they enter a restaurant or café,"[35] and market women in Sierra Leone who could innocuously cross checkpoints and pass information to fighting forces thus contribute to greater controls and danger for all women in their societies.

Second, women may be seen as more neutral and less threatening in war, which may open possibilities for their effective involvement in peace-building work. Members of any group that warring factions respect and view as unthreatening have this peace-building potential. This also enables members of such groups to initiate contact with communities in conflict when those deemed to be dangerous (for example, "enemy" men) cannot.

Examples are numerous, and they do not always involve women. In postwar Bosnia, female peace workers were able to engage in cooperative work between communities where men might not. Swanee Hunt, former United States ambassador to Austria and founder of the peace-building group, "Women Waging Peace," observes:

> Since people assume the men are firing the shells, the women are less branded after the conflict is quelled. This was pointed out to me by a woman who runs a youth centre in central Bosnia who said she could walk across the divided city for months before men dared to, and since women generally aren't behind the guns, they . . . *seem* to have less psychological distance to go in the reconciliation process (italics mine).[36]

Note that it is not the *reality* of whether Bosnian women reconcile more easily than men – and in my experience doing peace-building work in Bosnia, I am not convinced that they do – but the *appearance* that they do that enables them to cross lines more easily than men. Similarly, Bosnian Jews were able to act as intermediaries because they were seen as unthreatening.[37]

Hunt also cites the example of a predominantly women's political party founded in Northern Ireland in 1996. When founders Monica McWilliams and May Blood were told that the peace talks would only include leaders of the ten main political parties, they organized their own party, after gathering 10,000 signatures of support.[38] Hunt says that this put them in an excellent position to mediate when a crisis arose in the talks:

> When peace talks broke down, they were the ones who carried messages across the lines . . .. Their previous work with families and communities who had been affected by the trouble also enabled them to formulate salient contributions to peace agreements, such as getting former political prisoners to act as mediators in communities during 'marching season.'[39]

Liberian women found themselves in a similar position. A Liberian peace activist told me that she and a group of women peacebuilders were able to bring fighting Liberian warlords together for pre-negotiation talks when the latter would not meet with other intermediaries. When one woman asked the warlords why they agreed to meet with them, one powerful warlord replied, "When your mother calls, you must come." Again, in Sierra Leone, the Inter-religious Council – a group of men in this case – which was respected and seen as neutral by all sides, acted as intermediaries in peace talks that led to the 1999 Lomé Peace Accord when rebel and government forces refused to meet each other directly.

If Kofi Annan is right that women have been successful in "building bridges" between communities, it may simply be because they are respected within their traditional roles and their activities are seen as not threatening – or even of little public significance – whereas men's activities often are. The interesting question for peace workers and scholars may be how to identify, prepare, and preserve the more trusted and respected reputation of as many potentially "neutral" – or at least perceived to be neutral – groups as possible so that when a critical opportunity or crisis in peace-building occurs, they are ready to step in.

Challenging the Stereotypes

Many a combat soldier in World War II was appalled to receive letters from his girlfriend or wife, safe at home, demanding to know how many of the enemy he had personally accounted for and often requesting the death of several more as a personal favour for her![40]

Even in the face of substantial contradictory evidence, stereotypes entrenched in hegemonic discourses are notoriously hard to shake. Studies of soldiers, for example, do not support the myth that men are inclined toward violence. Military observers have long commented on the striking reluctance of sol-

diers to kill.[41]   The American military historian, S.L.A. Marshall wrote that in World War II, "fear of killing, rather than fear of being killed, was the most common cause of battle failure."[42] The American military has responded to this common aversion to killing by developing strategies and training methods that distance soldiers from the consequences of their actions and program them to shoot automatically.[43] Yet the myth of men as natural warriors has been perpetuated both by popular cinema and by military institutions that could not tolerate questioning of their military ethic. Soldiers who question war institutions have, at best, been seen as "insane" or "needing a rest"[44] and, at worst, been executed as "cowards" or "traitors."

The myth that women are naturally peaceful is also unsubstantiated. As Elshtain[45] writes, it is "clear that women (have been) as susceptible as men to war-time rhetoric and 'holy war' constructions." According to Glenn Gray, women may not carry out the direct violence of war but they subscribe to "a structure of oppositions" that promotes it. Women share and reinforce totalitarian images which view "the enemy" as representing a "principle of evil one must stomp out." This encourages a "crusading ethos" that enables the worst excesses of war.[46]

As Goldstein writes, well over a million women have served in armed forces in many parts of the world and at many times in history. During World War II, around 800,000 women served in the Soviet Red Army, according to official statistics, and of these, around 500,000 served at the front. Another 200,000 women are estimated to have served in the partisan forces at this time. Similarly, in 1851, around 6,000 women served as soldiers in the Dahomean army (in present-day Benin), comprising more than a third of the armed forces of that kingdom. This is not to mention women who took famous leadership positions in military forces, including Joan of Arc; the "legendary . . . British queen Boudica (who) led a rebellion against the Romans around 60 AD," and the Trung sisters in Vietnam who created an army to expel Chinese invaders in 39 AD.[47]

But military women and women in public positions are not the focus of this article. Rather I am interested in women's support for war within their "private" realms. Again, women's non-military support for war has a long history. Goldstein writes:

> Women commonly egged men on to war in Norse legends, among Germans fighting the Roman empire, and among Aryans of India. 'Rwala [Bedouin] women bared their breasts and urged their men to war.' In the Kitwara empire, the Zulu kingdom and elsewhere in Africa, women stayed at home during a war expedition and followed strict taboos (such as silence in an entire village) to bring magical powers to the war party. Zulu women also ran naked before departing warriors.[48]

In World War I, more than 25,000 American women served in Europe in non-military capacities, including as nurses, telephone operators, entertainers, and journalists.[49] Goldstein writes:

> Despite hardships, the women had 'fun' and 'were glad they went.' . . . Army efforts to keep women to the rear proved difficult. 'Women kept ignoring orders to leave the troops they were looking after, and bobbing up again after they had been sent to the rear.' Some of the US women became 'horrifyingly bloodthirsty' in response to atrocity stories and exposure to the effects of combat.[50]

Similarly, in Northern Ireland, Morgan writes, women "have been both peacemakers and peace preventers and . . . the range of their attitudes and responses has been as wide and varied as that of men."[51] Jacobson's research on women's support for the "Good Friday" peace agreement in Northern Ireland reveals that "a substantial percentage of Protestant women did not 'vote for peace.'"[52] Similarly, a survey by the Israel Institute for Applied Social Research indicates that, between 1968 and 1981, Israeli women were consistently less willing than men to return even a small amount of Judea and Samaria. And in 1982, Modiin Ezrachi found that a high percentage of both men (94.6 percent) and women (92.3 percent) in Israel felt their government's "operation" in Lebanon was justified.[53]

Some examples of women encouraging troops can be partly explained as women protecting and caring for those they love. This was well articulated by an American "soccer mom" who explained her change in attitude about sending US troops to Iraq. Betsy Hart wrote in an opinion piece in *The Christian Science Monitor*, "What motivates me is this: I don't want my kids to be on the receiving end of smallpox, a chemical weapon, or – most horrifying of all – a nuclear device, courtesy of Hussein. But I do think that is exactly what Hussein wants."[54] A September 2002 CNN poll found that many United States women had also changed their views. Fifty-eight per cent supported the US government sending ground troops into Iraq, up from 45 per cent in 1991.[55]

But a large amount of women's support for expansionism or oppression cannot be explained as protecting and caring for loved ones. With the high visibility of upper caste Hindu women in campaigns against Muslims and lower caste Hindus in India, Indian feminists have had to seriously examine women's active role in promoting and supporting Hindu nationalist violence.[56] In her research on women's narrative songs in Gujarat, Parita Mukta observes that many songs, which are "extremely popular among women of all social communities and groups," graphically describe acts of violence, often leading to death, by older women toward their daughters-in-law. She found that many Indian women share "a *common-sense* understanding that certain women are capable of inflicting/orchestrating a violent death on other women (in the family)."[57]

> Women who have not been organically tied to the ideologies and different forms of praxes which have emerged out of contemporary feminisms appear to have no illusions, and do not subscribe to the myth of women's innocence, and indeed take the brutality of a mother-in-law and a sister-in-law as a salient part of the social world.[58]

Violence by powerful women in the family toward other female family members should not be understood as personal violence; it should be "situated within the structure of power *between women* of the household," Mukta[59] argues. Similarly, women's fierce defence of oppressive class and religious relationships should be understood as the exercise of inter-group power, in which dominant women are fully implicated. In the early 1980s, many urban, upper caste Hindu women fought hard to prevent affirmative action programs that would benefit lower caste Hindus. They have also actively supported attacks against Muslim minorities which culminated most visibly in the demolition of the mosque in Ayadhya in 1982. Mukta concludes that:

> Within the multiple identities inhabited by women, large numbers of them have chosen, in contemporary times of acute political crises, to reconstitute themselves as *powerful and privileged women vis-à-vis* those seeking a formal recognition of their disadvantage, and structural ways of rectifying this.[60]

Such ardent defence of privilege is far from limited to upper caste Hindu women. Many white South African women were strong defenders of the oppressive apartheid system. Similarly, many wealthy and middle class servant-dependant women in Sierra Leone pay their male and female employees salaries that do not enable the latter to provide the basics for their families, including education for their children. In the 1930s, many middle class German women strongly supported the rising Nazi party[61] and female nationalists in Bosnia have strongly defended – or denied – war crimes conducted by their own side. Why then, in the face of so much evidence to the contrary, is the myth of women's innocence in war so hard to shake off? Answers may lie in the way we conceptualize violence.

Reviewing Responsibility

In her examination of women's roles in war, Linda Grant De Pauw suggests four categories of involvement:

(a)   the classic roles of victim and instigator;

(b)   combat support roles;

(c)   "virago" roles that perform masculine functions without changing feminine appearance (such as warrior queens, women members of home militias, or all-female combat units); and

(d)   warrior roles in which women become like men, often changing clothing or other gender markers.[62]

These are the roles that have drawn most academic attention regarding women's active participation in war. However, with the possible exception of combat support roles, these categories miss the many ways in which women support war violence within their private spheres: in the home and in casual connections in the community. This article argues that understanding women's private sphere support for war violence – in addition to their more public political and military roles – might suggest new opportunities and strategies for peacebuilding.

Heribert Adam offers an alternative way of looking at citizen's roles in violence. In his discussion of truth commissions, Adam suggests that citizens fall into six categories of "guilt, responsibility and complicity" for gross human rights violations and crimes of an authoritarian state: instigators, perpetrators, supporters, bystanders, dissenters, and victims. While it is not within the scope of this article to analyze such weighty issues as levels of culpability for war crimes and human rights violations, these categories suggest a way of placing women's support for war violence within the private sphere in which many women and men operate. Adam writes that *instigators* "devise, authorize and propagate the regime at its most senior level of power."[63] *Perpetrators* directly carry out gross human rights violations. *Supporters* actively assist perpetrators or the regime, and "range from active collaborators to party members" to people who voted for the regime. *Bystanders* are those who did not directly assist the regime, but who did not act to resist it either. Their "passive tolerance of injustices allowed authoritarian rulers free reign in the first place."[64] *Dissenters* take risks to undermine the regime. *Victims* are directly affected by gross human rights violations or an exploitative system.[65]

Adam's framework is useful for locating women's support for war violence; most women fall into the categories of "supporters" or "bystanders." For this analysis, however, his description of supporters needs to be clearly delineated and expanded. In creating these categorizations, Adam appears to be primarily concerned with how they relate to first, war crimes or gross human rights violations; and second, support for an oppressive regime or ideology. However, while "instigators" and "perpetrators" are easily discussed in relation to abuses on all sides of a violent conflict, he appears to discuss "supporters" and "bystanders" primarily as they relate to support for an oppressive regime or ideology.

As this article considers all support for conflict-related violence, whether for the regime or for other groups, a third type of support must be added: support for intergroup violence in general. Here, the "rightness" of the cause is not an issue. Support for violent "liberation" struggles is as much support for violence as that for an expansionist army. Including intergroup violence in this

analysis implies that both those who command and strategize military operations and those who directly conduct war violence fit Adam's categories of instigators and perpetrators. My discussion of supporters follows from this.

In light of these three, often interrelated, focuses of support – gross human rights violations, an oppressive regime, and inter-group violence – Adam's category of "supporters" could be divided into four subcategories, some of which are neglected by war and conflict analysts. It is precisely in these "invisible" subcategories that most women's support for violence and oppressive systems can be found.[66]

(a)   *Military and security personnel:* These include informers, wardens, drivers, and communications and medical personnel who work for state or oppositional military or security systems. Some, like informers, wardens or prison nurses, collaborate with perpetrators of gross human rights violations but fall outside the scope of judicial apparatuses.

(b)   *Public political supporters:* Among regime supporters, these include parliamentarians, journalists, business leaders, and activists with non-governmental organizations who actively promote an exploitative ideological system. Among opposition groups, these include politicians, political organizers, spokespeople, and fundraisers who advocate change through violence or use financial support to fund military actions.

(c)   *Civil servants and private employees:* They support the regime or oppositional violence. This subcategory includes teachers who reinforce the dogma of a violent regime or violent oppositional ideologies, low-level administrators, or private employees who administer an oppressive or violent system.

(d)   *Private supporters, promoters and watchdogs of enemy thinking and war ideologies:* Home and informal community environments strongly shape the way people, in particular children, think of themselves in relationship to others and their attitudes toward violence. Women – often working in households within their gendered roles as primary caregivers, socializers of children and supporters and cajolers of male soldiers – are active in this category. Women in privileged positions often enjoy and cling to ideologically informed privileges. Many act as watchdogs and advocates of oppressive structures and ideologies in their communities. Small-scale private donors who contribute financially to war efforts are also included here.

Women who act as leaders and direct perpetrators of violence fall under the scrutiny of post-war judicial institutions just as their male counterparts do. However, as the South African TRC noted, few women fall into these cate-

gories.[67] Most female supporters of war violence and oppression fall among the "supporters" in subcategories c and d, categories excluded from public scrutiny.

The Private-Public Spheres

As Adam's categorizations suggest, violence and oppression receive public attention when they are recognized as matters of public concern. Thus, while public supporters of violence may receive media and judicial attention, private supporters within homes and communities are either ignored or aggregated into some dehumanized, systemic notion such as an "apartheid system" or an "ethnic nationalist ideology."[68] Feminist writers have struggled to bring violence against women and children in the home into the public sphere and thus have it acknowledged as an issue of public concern.[69] Yet most feminists who write about war fail to examine the way women, often operating in the private sphere, contribute to war violence. They seem reluctant to risk exposing women's private support for violence – with profoundly public implications – to public debate.

Many seeds of enemy thinking or attitudes of entitlement are planted within the home environment. Women, as primary child rearers, must play a role in this. Women also support husbands and sons who enter the military or militias. In Somalia, women, perhaps less unusually than is acknowledged, determine whether men fight or make peace.[70] Judy El-Bushra and Cecile Mukarubuga observe:

> It is within women's power to reconstruct or reinforce relationships and attitudes across generations, by the way they bring their children up. In many instances it is women who decide at what moment hostilities have gone too far, exert pressure on men to stop fighting (often by withholding sexual services), or create dialogue with estranged neighbours.[71]

Despite this, public depictions of women and war keep "women-in-the-household-and-community" squarely in the "invisible," private realm. A desire to protect civilians from being seen as legitimate military targets may partly explain this selective focus. The way in which violence has been conceptualized may also influence it.

Interpretations of Violence

Johan Galtung,[72] one of the pioneers of European peace studies, differentiates between three types of violence: direct, structural, and cultural. The most common, "common-sense" understanding of violence is of direct violence, which C. Coady defines as "positive interpersonal acts of force, usually involving the infliction of physical injury."[73] This view, which appears to follow Western legal traditions, limits responsibility for violence to those who directly command and conduct violent acts. It fails to both acknowledge systems and

ideologies that inform violence (such as a homophobic fundamentalist Christian ideology that creates a permissive environment for anti-gay violence) and individuals who condone and support them. Such a definition misses the way many women perpetuate and support chauvinistic and exploitative ideologies and cultures, both in their child rearing and in community activities, and the blind commitment that many women have for family members, often denying or justifying away acts of violence carried out in their names.[74]

Structural violence is caused by structures and discourses that require, enforce, and legitimate the division and disempowerment of people and groups. Such structures create, for example, hierarchical systems of class, ethnicity, gender, and geographically-based, dual reward systems for labor, capital, and resources, all of which ensure the supply of a pool of dependent and low-cost labour. Although many women actively shape and reinforce such exploitative systems and discourses, their roles are obscured by depersonalized conceptions of systems. I argue here that individual responsibility for violent or exploitative discourses and structures need to be acknowledged, especially the responsibility of those who benefit from them and who have the power to influence them.

Galtung's important category of cultural violence highlights the way cultures reproduce conceptions of the "other" that permit, even encourage, enemy thinking and violence. Cultural violence is "Those aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence . . . that can be used to justify or legitimise direct or structural violence . . . .. Cultural violence makes direct and structural violence look, even feel, right – or at least not wrong."[75]

As child rearers, community members, and religious devotees, women are active in spreading and reinforcing cultural norms, yet here again, they are rendered invisible by broad conceptions of ideology, religion, and culture. Sociologists, political scientists, and philosophers have long talked in abstract terms about the very arenas where women were active but their involvement and responsibility in perpetuating the process of cultural renewal and enforcement have rarely been acknowledged. Only those in the public realm were visible. Adam's breakdown of responsibility for violence might provide a way of rendering women's participation in violent discourses visible. By highlighting ways in which individuals, both in the private sphere and within faceless bureaucracies (two areas where women are most active), support war violence and oppression, essentialized views of gender responsibility for violence could be challenged.

CONCLUSION

In October 2000, two Brazilian women rose to important positions of power. Marta Suplicy became mayor of Sao Paulo and Ellen Gracie Northfleet was appointed to the Supreme Federal Tribunal. "It's been a good week for women in Brazil," Heldete Pereira, of Rio de Janeiro's Feminist Forum, said. "The voice of half the population is finally being heard."[76]

Pereira's statement highlights the appeal of – and much that is wrong with – current discussions about women and violence. Women are underrepresented in public decision-making bodies. The considerable talents of women working for justice and peace are neither adequately recognized nor tapped in many countries. Negotiating and peacekeeping structures have also been developed overwhelmingly by men and reflect patriarchical interests. So it is significant when women rise to positions where they can directly influence public policy. However, women of privilege, like men of privilege, have not demonstrated a notable inclination to understand and protect the interests of disadvantaged people – even other women and children – in their societies. More commonly, they justify away or deny violence and exploitation. Elite women in many countries, who benefit from nannies and maids, are unlikely to fundamentally challenge exploitative structures. Talk of representation and inclusion must be cognizant of this and must extend beyond gender categories to include men and women from many communities in decision-making structures.

Similarly, by helping to shield civilians in war and facilitating women's peace work in communities which are inaccessible to men, the myth of innocence may provide some benefits. But there is a cost. Such myths obscure important avenues through which enemy thinking and war ideologies are perpetuated, and essentialized notions of men and violence may dangerously force young men into warrior roles and cut off their potential for war resistance and peace work. Could conscription of young men exist without such a myth? Surely a more nuanced portrayal of gender and war – one that is far from current discourses – would better assist the cause of building peace

Endnotes

1. United Nations Security Council, *Press Release SC/6942: Security Council, Unanimously Adopting Resolution 1325 (2000), Calls for Broad Participation of Women in Peace Building, Post-Conflict Reconstruction*, 31 October 2000, Internet source: http.//www.un.org/News/ Press/docs/2000/20001031.sc6942.doc.html.

2. United Nations Security Council, *Press Release SC/6937: Stronger Decision-Making Role for Women in Peace Processes is Called for in Day-Long Security Council Debate*, 24 October 2000, Internet source: http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2000/20001031.sc6942.doc.html.

3. United Nations Security Council, *Press Release SC/6939: Security Council Concludes Open Debate on Women and Peace and Security,* 25 October 2000, Internet source: http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2000/20001031.sc6942.doc.html

4. More than half of the population are excluded because marginalization in public decision-making does not just occur on gender grounds; men and women are also marginalized on many other grounds, such as class, rural situation, or ethnicity.

5. See, for example, Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Women and War* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1987, 1995); Yuval-Davis, Nira, "National Reproduction and 'the Demographic Race' in Israel," in Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis, eds., *Woman-Nation-State* (London: Macmillan, 1989), pp. 92-109; Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation* (London: Sage, 1997); Parita Mukta, "Gender, Community, Nation: The Myth of Innocence," in Susie Jacobs, Ruth

Jacobson and Jennifer Marchbank, eds., *States of Conflict: Gender, Violence and Resistance* (London: Zed Books, 2000), pp. 163-78.

6. Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000).

7. For an excellent discussion of both women's demonstrated capabilities in war and of the categories of women combatants, torturers, and military leaders, see Joshua Goldstein, *War and Gender* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

8. Elshtain, *Women and War*, p. 149.

9. Ibid.

10. Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa (TRC), *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report*, vol. 4. (Cape Town: Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa, 1998), p. 312.

11. Ibid.

12. TRC report cited in Mary Burton, "Making Moral Judgements," in Charles Villa-Vicencio and Wilhelm Verwoerd eds., *Looking Back Reaching Forward: Reflections on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa* (London: Zed Books, 2000), p. 81.

13. Lefteris Pitarakis, Newspaper photograph (Associated Press), *Globe and Mail*, 10 October 2000, p. A11.

14. One *Globe and Mail* article (Matthew Kalman, "Women Admirers Eager to Marry Master Bomber," *Globe and Mail,* 19 September 2000, p. A10) did indicate that some Palestinian women do support acts of terrorism. The article describes how some Palestinian women have sent marriage proposals to a Hamas member who was convicted of masterminding suicide bombings. The article, however, provides no analysis of this support.

15. Philip Smucker, "Arab Women Take to the Streets," *The Christian Science Monitor*, 16 April 2002.

16. Paul Koring, "17 Feared Dead in Warship Blast," *Globe and Mail*, 13 October 2000, p. A10.

17. Goldstein, *War and Gender*.

18. Jane Addams, cited in Elshtain, *Women and War*, p. 235.

19. Ibid., p. 235.

20. Birgit Brock-Utne, *Feminist Perspectives on Peace and Peace Education* (Toronto: Pergamon Press, 1989).

21. Annika Takala, "Feminist Perspectives on Peace Education," *Journal of Peace Research*, 28, no. 2 (1991) p. 231.

22. Evelyn Henderson, "Women's Role in Educating for Peace," *Peace and Environment News*, March 1988, Internet source: http://perc.ca/PEN/1988-03/Henderson.html.

23. Mukta, "Gender," p. 163.

24. Jovanka Stoljsavljevic, "Women, Conflict and Culture in Former Yugoslavia," *Gender and Development* 3, no. 1 (February 1995), p. 37.

25. Haleh Afshar, "Women and Reproduction in Iran," in *Woman-Nation-State*; Yuval-Davis, "National Reproduction" pp. 92-109.

26. Goldstein, *War and Gender*.

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid., p. 50.

29. Ibid., p. 41.

30. Ibid., p. 42.

31. Ibid., p. 57.

32. Cynthia Cockburn, *The Space Between Us: Negotiating Gender and National Identities in Conflict* (New York: Zed Books, 1998, 2001) p. 44.

33. Takala, "Feminist Perspectives," p. 234.

34. I have also observed a tendency in grass roots post-war peace-building practice to emphasize and build on strengths and positive common interests of people in conflict, rather than to address qualities that support violence. The assumption seems to be that people will more willingly cooperate in programming (and NGOs need to be able to show successful programs) and that their positive involvement will cause them to reflect on and change problematic or chauvinistic behaviour.

35. Smucker, "Arab Women."

36. Sara Steindorf, "Wanted: More Women as Peace Brokers," *The Christian Science Monitor*, 26 February 2002, p. 16.

37. It is worth noting that Romani people in Bosnia, while they might have been viewed as neutral in the war, lacked this mediating potential because of widespread prejudice against them. Thus they did not have the respect needed for this role.

38. Steindorf, "Wanted," p. 16.

39. Ibid., p. 16.

40. Glenn Gray, cited in Elshtain, *Women and War*, p. 191.

41. As psychiatrist W.H.R. Rivers found in his study of soldiers in World War I, soldiers are motivated by "something stronger than patriotism, abstract principles, or hatred of the enemy. It was the love of soldiers for one another" that pushed them on. See Judith Hermann, *Trauma and Recovery* (New York: Basic Books, 1992, 1997), p. 22.

42. S.L.A. Marshall, cited in Elshtain, *Women and War*, p. 207.

43. Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* (Toronto: Back Bay Books, 1996).

44. The most famous example of this was the hospitalization of British officer and poet Siegfried Sassoon during World War I under the care of Rivers. Because Sassoon questioned the war and had begun to subscribe to pacifist ideas, he was sent for psychiatric treatment. River's discussions with Sassoon contributed to his theory of shell shock. For his part, Sassoon was "cured" of his doubts about the war and returned to battle. Hermann, *Trauma and Recovery*.

45. Elshtain, *Women and War*, p. 138.

46. Gray, cited in Ibid., p. 201.

47. Goldstein, *War and Gender*, p. 121.

48. Ibid., p. 317.

49. Ibid., p. 318.

50. Ibid., pp. 318-19.

51. V. Morgan, cited in Ruth Jacobson, "Women and Peace in Northern Ireland: A Complicated Relationship," in *States of Conflict*, p. 182.

52. Ibid., p. 194.

53. Yael Yishai, "Women and War: The Case of Israel," *Journal of Social, Political and Economic Studies* 10, no. 2 (1985), pp. 195-214.

54. Betsy Hart, "Why One Soccer Mom Wants Hussein Taken Out," *The Christian Science Monitor*, 2 December 2002, p. 9.

55. Kellyanne Conway, "Women Clearly Link Family Security With Being Tough on Iraq" *The Christian Science Monitor*, 2 December 2002, p. 9.

56. Mukta, "Gender," p. 164.

57. Ibid., p. 164.

58. Ibid., p. 164.

59. Ibid., pp. 164-5.

60. Ibid., p. 169.

61. Ute Frevert, *Women in German History: From Bourgeois Emancipation to Sexual Liberation* (Oxford: Berg, 1997).

62. Linda Grant De Pauw, cited in Goldstein, *War and Gender*, p. 60.

63. Heribert Adam, "Globalization of Justice: Truth Commissions as an Alternative?" Paper presented at the conference "On Truth, Justice, Accountability, and Reconciliation in Societies Emerging from Crimes Against Humanity," (Vancouver, BC: Peter Wall Institute for Advanced Studies, University of British Columbia, 13 October 2000), p. 2.

64. Ibid., p. 6.

65. Ibid.

66. People who support violence within an oppressive regime face different circumstances than people who conduct violent campaigns outside the governing structure – either in opposition to the regime or for another cause. The latter's support for violence and oppression may look different within each subcategory.

67. TRC, *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report*, vol. 4.

68. Supporters of such systems are often seen as being captured by an ideology or discourse with little scope for autonomous thinking and action. Zygmunt Bauman, for example, dehumanizes individual involvement by collaborators to the Holocaust by emphasizing the bureaucratic and industrial mechanisms that distanced people from the results of their efforts. Many women worked for the Nazi bureaucracy (Frevert, *Women in German History*.) and their culpability would be hidden by Bauman's structural analysis. See Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999).

69. Kate Hunt and Jenny Kitzinger, "Public Place, Private Issue? The Public's Reaction to the Zero Tolerance Campaign Against Violence Against Women," in Hannah Bradby, ed., *Defining Violence* (Brookfield, VT: Avebury, 1996), pp. 45-58.

70. Judy El-Bushra, "Transforming Conflict: Some Thoughts on a Gendered Understanding of Conflict Processes," in *States of Conflict*, pp. 66-85. In Somalia, El-Bushra writes, "women have always exercised an influence over whether men go to war or not, mainly through their roles as poetesses and recounters of stories to their children. This influence has often had the effect of inciting violence, when the women believed that the interests of the clan were best served thus,"

71. Judy El-Bushra and Cecile Mukarubuga, "Women, War and Transition," *Gender and Development* 3, no. 3 (October 1995).

72. Johan Galtung, "Cultural Violence," *Journal of Peace Research* 27 (March 1990) pp. 291- 305, reprinted in Nancy Lind and Manfred Steger eds., *Violence and Its Alternatives* (New York: St. Martin's) pp. 39-53.

73. C.A.J. Coady, "The Idea of Violence," *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 3 (January 1986), reprinted in *Violence and Its Alternatives*, p. 24.

74. Although Galtung has expanded on his definition of direct violence to include siege and sanctions, for the purposes of this article, it is simpler and more fitting to adopt the restricted definition of direct violence described above, i.e., direct action that leads to immediate physical injury of others. As mentioned above, such acts are usually carried out by men and are usually injuries that are recognized in courts.

75. Galtung, "Cultural Violence," p. 39.

76. Reuters, "Brazilian Women Make Strides in Male-Dominated Government," *Globe and Mail*, 2 November 2000, p. A14A.