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Practitioner's Toolkit: Gender in Peace and Conflict

by Paula Ditzel Facci

Welcome

Gender and the cognate subjects of race, class and ethnicity, among others, have a close relation with peace, conflict and violence. They play a relevant role in subjective identities, interrelational practices and social structures. However, sometimes gender is overlooked in peace and conflict work for being considered secondary, controversial, or put aside due to lack of knowledge on how to approach it. Learning about gender provides a valuable opportunity to understand deeper layers of conflicts and explore potential alternatives for promoting structural change, justice, healing, and conflict transformation.

This toolkit is an introduction on gender in peace and conflict for practitioners who are willing to incorporate a reflection about gender in their work, as well as others who are already working with gender and feminist approaches and seek to complement and refresh their perspectives. It might appeal to professionals in diverse areas such as education, humanitarian aid, development, advocacy and social change, nonviolent mobilization, and governmental and multi-lateral efforts. This material is designed to provide resources for reflecting and working with the concepts of gender and its cognates creatively and critically in one's own personal and professional life, allowing identification of new courses of action for conflict transformation in the local context.

Focusing on the peace and conflict workers themselves, this toolkit seeks to complement and enrich the fortunately growing production on gender in peace and conflict. It aims at providing topics for discussion, questions for reflection, and tools for guiding transformation. The content discusses key terms and perspectives on gender and how they influence peace, conflict and violence. It delves into intersectionality, exploring vulnerability and power in the intersections of difference and belonging, and offers guiding questions to reflect on and plan actions for conflict transformation through gender lens.

I hope this text communicates both to readers who are enthusiastic about feminism and gender, and to ones who present some sort of resistance to it. The invitation is for open dialogue, reflection grounded on experience and enriched in exchange, and development of contextualized transformative action that foments equality, reduction of violence, and flourishing of potentials for all.

PAULA DITZEL FACCI is a researcher, lecturer and facilitator in Peace and Conflict Transformation. She is dedicated to research and facilitation in the areas of peace, conflict transformation, and creative methods to elicit conflict transformation, with focus on movement.

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Key Terms and Discussions on Gender in Peace and Conflict

How is gender related to peace and conflicts? This chapter introduces key terms and perspectives in peace, conflict and gender. It aims at facilitating an understanding of core concepts, providing a shared frame from where to unfold discussion and offering references for further exploration. It outlines main discussions in gender in peace and conflicts, gendered views on peace and conflict, women's roles in war and peace and contradictions and challenges in the field.

1.1 Peace

What is peace for you? How do you define it conceptually? How and when do you experience it? There are diverse interpretations of peace in different cultures, and its experience is potentially felt differently according to each person and context. However, peace is often talked about as a homogeneous and consensual topic, and details about its interpretations are not made explicit or discussed. Therefore, it is often not clear what kind of peace governors, agencies, grassroots mobilizers and peoples are talking about. Is it absence of war? Is it a sense of justice and security? Is it connected to the conditions for people to flourish to their potential without impediments? Is it connected to development, and in this case, which development? The ways in which peace is understood define the strategies put into practice to foster it. Therefore, this is a relevant question for ongoing reflection: what is the peace you want to see and experience, and how can you provide conditions for it to unfold?

The following paragraphs present core concepts of peace. Instead of an extensive list of meanings in search of a proper definition, this overview is meant to inspire reflections and discussions on peace. The intention is to facilitate understanding one's own perspectives on peace and to enable engaging with diverse peaces discussed by the different actors in the peace and conflict field.

Negative peace refers to the absence of war and direct violence, while **positive peace** refers to absence of violence ingrained in structures in connection to social justice (Galtung 1969).

Imperfect peace questions the idea of peace as a final and perfect product to be reached as a result of an implementation of steps. It highlights peace as imperfect, as an alive and dynamic daily life experience which embraces conflict rather than tries to get rid of it (Muñoz 2006).

Gendered peace questions the frontiers of war and peace in the experience of women and takes into consideration the violence in war and peace times. It calls for a peace that considers gendered realities and is not blind to the different ways violence affects men, women, and non-binary people. (The London School of Economics and Political Science 2020, Pankhurst 2003).

Many peaces and the transrational peace philosophy acknowledge peaces in plural, as an experience lived differently by different people, and argue the importance of themes as harmony, justice, security and truth to a plural and balanced understanding of peace. It highlights that human beings are rational, but are also much more: they are also emotional, sexual, relational, and spiritual beings, and so are their experiences of peace (Dietrich 2014, 2012).

Feminist peace is grounded in women's epistemologies, feminist activism and theory. It highlights the political aim of transformation, calling for transformative social approaches and practices that integrate gender perspectives and equal

participation in search for peace, justice and security for all (Weber 2018, Confortini 2011, PeaceWomen.org n.d.).

These and other perspectives on peace permeate the current debates on gender in peace and conflict. As a reference and compass for this discussion, peace is understood as plural, local, related to place, culture and people. This plurality asks for openness to different interpretations of peace, as well as engagement in criticism and dialogue, learning from and with them, and also questioning limitations and aspects that might be violent.

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Reflection

- What is peace for you? Which concepts of peace permeate your own understanding of peace? How is peace understood in the guidelines of the organization, institution, agency, country or community you work with? How do these understandings influence your and their actions and projects? What are the highlights and limitations of these different understandings of peace? What other understandings of peace could be integrated to broaden the discussion on peace, conflict and gender?
- How do you experience peace? How often are you experiencing it? What conditions and elements can be put in place for you to experience peace in a way that nurtures your life and work?

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1.2 Conflict and Violence

Conflict is often understood only in a negative manner, as synonym for war or violence, or to indicate an obstacle to peace. Understanding peace as plural, however, implies that different perspectives may generate tension, and from this tension new understandings and possibilities of transformation can be developed (Lederach 2003). Therefore, conflict is understood as a natural feature of human interrelations, a tension derived from different ways of being and relating (Echavarría Alvarez and Koppensteiner 2018, Dietrich 2014). Conflicts are differentiated from violence, facilitating an understanding of a peace that is not static, but that incorporates conflict in a dynamic resonance to changes in life and context. Conflict calls attention to dysfunctional relationship or modes of communication and presents the opportunity to engage with the energies present in the system for transforming relationships into more authentic, honest and corresponding to the context (Satir 1991, Dietrich 2013). As humanistic psychology pioneer Virginia Satir affirmed, the problem is not conflict, but the way they are dealt with (1991, 17). Therefore, conflicts can be transformed, and learning skills and practicing abilities for transformation is crucial in the process. Whenever not dealt with or repressed, conflicts can become violent.

Different strategies of dealing with conflicts have been developed as a reflex of these different understandings, encompassing **conflict resolution, conflict management, conflict settlement, and conflict transformation** (Miall, Ramsbotham and Woodhouse 2010). Following the understanding of peace as plural and of conflict as a natural feature of human relationships, this toolkit focuses, particularly on chapter 5 and 6, on conflict transformation (Lederach 2005, Dietrich 2013).

A multi-layered approach to **violence** also contributes to expand understanding and facilitates mobilization to reduce it. Johan Galtung, a Norwegian peace researcher, developed a framework to understand violence in its direct, structural and cultural forms. **Direct violence** is harm inflicted physically or psychologically by someone onto someone. **Structural violence** is embedded in structures which reproduce inequality and social injustice. **Cultural violence** involves dehumanization of the other, as racism, xenophobia, colonization, patriarchy (Galtung 1969, 1996).

Gender-based violence is violence directed at a person because of their gender. Rooted in gender inequality, if affects men, women and non-binary people, disproportionately affecting women and girls. It is framed by the Istanbul Convention

as a violation of human rights and a discrimination. It entails acts of "physical, sexual, psychological or economic harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life" (Council of Europe 2011).

Direct violence received a further nuance with an understanding of its impacts on **personal** and **relational** levels (Dugan 1996, Lederach 1997, 82). The layers of violence as personal, relational, structural and cultural help understand the multilayered and intricated impact of violence in the conflictive system, from individual to societies. It also facilitates acknowledging **violence as a phenomenon** lived by people and communities, which has social reverberances and which is understandable from within. This perspective highlights how violence impacts the flesh, bodies, minds, relationships and sense of humanity of human beings, asking for attention to survivors and communities in terms of healing and weaving the social fabric back together, while creating social, political and economic conditions to reduce violence (Lederach and Lederach 2010, Gulowski 2018, Pearce and Dietrich 2019).

In association with **human needs and rights**, violence can be described as a way of addressing conflict in an attempt to do **justice** or undo injustice in a way that causes harms by denying the human needs of others (Schirch 2004, 22). Finally, **violence** has been understood as an unskillful use of **energy**, which unbridled and based on hatred causes harm, hurt and destruction. Being an energy, it can be redirected toward healthier expressions (Jung 1981, Vessantara 1993). Violence is not the only possible response to challenges, as **nonviolent** initiatives in different fields show[1].

Understanding that compassion is just as much a possibility as violence, a **transformative approach to conflic**t proceeds to creatively explore possible changes, encouraging "(…) greater understanding of underlying relational and structural patterns while building creative solutions that improve relationships" (Lederach 2003, 19). **Elicitive conflict transformation** suggests engaging the knowledge already existing in individuals and communities, catalyzing it and generating new alternatives. This process can modify the energy flow of one or more human beings in a way that more open, free, and healthy patterns emerge (Lederach 1995, Dietrich 2013). It suggests moving from an either/or perspective to a both/and approach, sustaining paradoxes in a way that reveals alternatives of action for change.

Change is affected by altering at least one element in the system, and consequently by their interconnectedness, it affects all the others (Satir 1991: 157-73). Considering a systemic perspective, **peace and conflict workers** are not external observers or experts but are part of the conflict system they intend to transform (Dietrich 2013). In an interconnected world, they can be part of the conflict even if not stepping into it physically, by reproducing behaviors in relating to others, consuming and lifestyle patterns, for example. Therefore, the peace and conflict worker can contribute in the transformation of the system by their own presence and openness for being the change in the world and changing with it. Transformation happens not only 'out there' in the field with others, but also 'within and between' oneself, one's family, organization, community and society.

Reflection

- How do you deal with conflicts? What are the tools you often use to engage in conflictive situations?
- What patterns do you tend to replicate whenever in a conflict, and what are their outcomes? Which ones are most likely to contribute to transformation, and which ones are not?
- What are the violences you perpetuate in your daily life? How can these violent patterns be changed?

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1   For more, see David Cortright (2016), Jean-Marie Muller (2014) and Marshall Rosenberg (2005).

1.4 Gender

Gender can be concisely defined as "a social system wherein people, objects, practices, and numerous other things are categorized as 'masculine', or 'feminine', or both, based on qualities conventionally associated with men and women" (Kearney 2017, xvi). These categorizations are constructed and learned through socialization processes, varying according to context and time. The rules and norms derived from this system create differences and inequalities in the responsibilities, rights and opportunities between boys and girls, men and women, and other categorizations following the dichotomy of masculinity and femininity. As a response to inequality and exclusion, **gender equality** does not mean men and women become the same, but that their rights, responsibilities and opportunities do not depend on whether they are born male or female (UN Women n.d.).

Gender has been in the center stage of political discussions around the world, in initiatives to further rights and opportunities as well as in discourses that question and criticize it as an unhelpful lens. **Gender politics** define "the ongoing struggles over ideas about and values related to women and men, femininity and masculinity, and cisgender and transgender people" (Kearney 2017, xviii). The discussion around gender asks for an intercommunicating approach that includes race[2], class, ethnicity, poverty-level, age, and other markers associated with hierarchies of worth and value that hinder opportunities and cause harm.

Gender discussions and the activism for equality and change has been significantly mobilized by feminists. **Feminism** is a plural movement seeking to end gender oppression and to bring about gender equality (Kearney 2017, xviii). Alicia Garza, co-founder of the movement Black Lives Matter, defines feminism as "(…) a social, political, economic system by which all genders are valued, respected and can live dignified lives" (UN Women 2020, 17) The ways of getting there and how it looks like vary greatly among the many perspectives and approaches (Kolmar and Bartkowski 2010). Resistance to engage with feminist theories under a homogeneous and superficial label of 'man-hating' overlooks this plurality and the important contributions feminist thinking and activism have made throughout the centuries. The following paragraphs, therefore, invite the reader to concisely engage with some of the main discussions in thinking and action in feminism. This perspective is significantly US-Europe centric, reflecting the Western look of the discipline of Gender Studies and sciences in general. Nevertheless, it is important to highlight that movements for the value, protection, equality and celebration of women and diversity have been present in different parts of the world throughout history.

While gender studies as a field is relatively recent, feminist philosophies are much older. Paula Gunn Allen writes about views of the feminine in American Indian Traditions that have been passed down through generations (Allen 1992). Mary Wollstonecraft' Vindication of the Rights of Women, considered a founding text, is dated from the late eighteenth century (Wollstonecraft n.d.). Feminist activism dates back to the late nineteenth century, when women were mostly assigned to a private sphere, being denied rights and access to the public sphere of society such as employment, education and civic life. Activism emerged as a response to social transformations caused by industrialization and urbanization. By involvement with other women, activists begin to see themselves as a sex category, what was crucial for the development of organized social movement (Kearney 2017).

In what is known as the **first wave** of feminism, activism focused on women's rights, more specifically the right to vote. Some women defended a gradual improvement of certain aspects of women's lives, under a **reformist perspectiv**e, while the **suffragists** had a more liberal approach and advocated legal reform to change gender inequality rooted in law (Kearney 2017, 26). The criticism they received is that it was

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2   Race is approached in this text as a matter of social construction shaped by context. Magee defines racism as a complex of behavior and explanatory stories that enable assertion of power of some human beings over others, that depends on the idea and practice of people being assigned racial labels that sit in a hierarchy of worth in relation to other racial labels (2019). For more, see chapter 3 on Intersectionality, and Magee's book *The Inner Work of Racial Justice* (2019).

predominantly white, wealthy, and male-centered, having man as the norm around which women gravitates.

Second Wave Feminism encompasses a variety of approaches beginning in the 1920-1940's, when women were working in WW II war industry and other roles and were then sent back to the housewife's role and/or domestic work upon the return of male soldiers. **Women's liberation movement** from the 1960s and 70s focused on issues of discrimination and advocated full equality with men. **Radical feminism** had a strong Marxist influence, focused on labor and defended elimination of sex-based social divisions via revolution. In the 1980s, **intersectionality** gained visibility, highlighting the need to understand gender together with other identity markers (race, class, sexuality) (Kearney 2017, 27).

More recently, **Liberal Feminism**, also known as **Equality Feminism**, mobilized many movements around equal rights in different spheres of public life and contributed to prohibitions of gender discrimination, improved treatment in public spaces, and increased presence and inclusion of women in social and political realms. Criticisms it received is that, by focusing on women being equal to men, it does not require much change from men. Furthermore, it has been criticized about its use of a narrow and generalizing category of women (i.e. white, middle-class, hetero, able-bodied, Western) (Kearney 2017, 27-28).

Cultural feminism, fomenting discussions since the 1970s, defended women as biologically and psychology different from men, and emphasized the importance of valuing female and femininity beyond an entanglement with men as the norm to measure women up. Scholarship focused on women-centered approaches to analyze roles and practices related to women and femininity, expanding knowledge and legitimating women's experiences (Kearney 2017, 27-29). A criticism it received is that it often entailed **essentialist** views on man and woman, based on immutable, transhistorical and eternal essence of femaleness and maleness. Furthermore, sexual difference is seen as innate, and therefore would justify speaking in a unitary female voice, leading to a generalizing view on experience and to speaking in the name of others, or for others (Kolmar and Bartkowski 2010, 40-41).

The current period of feminist activism is referred to as **third wave feminism** and is influenced by poststructuralist and third world feminism. **Poststructuralist theories** discuss the social construction of gender and argue that theories have socio-historical contexts, challenging monolithic narratives and dualistic thinking. **Third world feminism** called attention to difference and multiple intersectional elements of identity. It subverts a one-dimensional perspective on identity, directs greater attention to males and masculinity, and also reclaims sexuality and popular culture (Kearney 2017, 28-30). It is important to highlight that the term "third world" is problematized by its eurocentrism, imperialism and connection to an unquestioned notion of development (Kolmar and Bartkowski 2010, 53-54).

Furthermore, **postfeminism** is a contemporary notion that women can 'have it all', that equality already exists and consequently feminism is irrelevant nowadays, despite the many data showing otherwise. It takes equality for granted and repudiates feminist struggles against oppression (Kearney 2017, 28).

In peace, conflict and security, these practices, activisms and theories generated different views on women as well. One debate revolves around the discussion of women as pacifists or patriots. **Pacifists** engaged on resistance to war via anti-war movements, focused on civilian victims and in the insecurity and vulnerability generated by war, highlighting a connection between state, war and masculinity. **Patriots** emphasized the roles of protecting the nation and defended the participation of feminists in armed movements and militaries, focusing on access to power. Their argument revolved around roles of protection and security, and defended men and women had the same rights, including to participate in war (Weber 2018, 87). Another debate that marked presence in the field revolves around **freedom**, whose strategy is to dismantle oppressive systems, and **equality**, which focuses on bringing women in. While they do not need to be exclusionary, prioritization of attention and resources leads to different strategies (Weber 2018, 87-88).

Other notions of gendered securities in feminist peace and conflict studies revolves around the idea of the **maternal thinking**, purporting that mothers, and consequently women, are naturally peaceful, caring and relational. The criticism this thinking received is that its perspective essentializes women as peaceful, and overlooks mothers' roles as agitators, participants in violence, mobilizers of young fighters, and their role in the perpetuation of patriarchy in raising children. However, the mobilization of mothers has been an important element in activism and mobilization against violence. Considering this potential, Spivak's **strategic essentialism** argues that identity has a relevant role on feminist politics, for the organizing, resistance and political action of subordinate groups (Weber 2018, 92-96, Kolmar and Bartkowski 2010, 41).

Further topic in the gendered securities in peace and conflict is the emerging engagement with the idea of **masculinities**, seeing them in their plurality and acknowledging the complexity of the geography around masculinities. It also emphasizes the interplay among local, regional and international levels, and the intersectionality of masculinities as well. It criticizes what is called toxic masculinity and questions the essentialist view of man and war. The criticism it receives is that it is often overly focused on intra and interrelation aspects, overlooking the need for engagement with structural change (Weber 2018, 96, Myrttinen, Naujoks and El-Bushra 2014).

It is relevant to highlight that these perspectives are not static and isolated but are often intertwined in discussions about gender and peace. Advances on the protection of rights and structural changes are also not stable and cannot be taken for granted, but often have to be regularly accompanied, and mobilized. To shed light on contemporary discussions on gender, the next paragraphs take a look at the advances, contributions and criticism regarding two United Nations resolutions that are influential for gender, peace and conflict: **Resolution 1325 on Women and Peace and Security** (United Nations Security Council 2000), and the contemporary **Resolution 2467** (United Nations Security Council 2019).

Resolution 1325 (2000) reaffirms the important role of women in peace and conflict and stresses the importance of equal participation and full involvement in all efforts in the field. It urges to increase participation of women and incorporation of gender perspectives and to protect women and girls from gender-based violence. Among its remarkable contributions, it provides important operational mandates, with implications for Member States and the UN System. The criticism that it received is that it purports mostly a liberal perspective, with a limited perspective on bringing women in, which is not enough (United Nations Security Council 2000, Weber 2018).

Resolution 2467 (2019) acknowledges the role of small guns and the role of shadow industries in gender-based violence and calls for more holistic understandings of justice and accountability in gender-based violence. It has an important explicit emphasis on girls and promotes a shift from victim to survivor-centered language. Furthermore, it calls for more research and disaggregated data on gender and for the inclusion of experts on gender and sexual violence in field work. Finally, it urges for listening to local women and to removing procedural impediments for justice, as discrediting of victims' testimony (United Nations Security Council 2019, United Nations Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict 2019). It ensures continuation of State legal obligations and the basis for civil society action for implementation of those obligations (Chinkin and Rees 2019). The criticisms that have been levelled at the resolution are that it struggles to address sexual and reproductive health, that it does not address effectively the need for protection of women human rights defenders and members of the LGBTQI community. Furthermore, it has been pointed out that the approach on men and boys does not encompass the complexity of gender in peace and conflict[3].

There have been many advancements in the protection of rights for women and girls. While they cannot be taken for granted or as a final response, it is important

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3   For a detailed commentary on the resolution, see Chinkin and Rees (2019)

that they are celebrated. Other **challenges** remain present, nevertheless, as the still prevalence in discourses of the binary active/violent men, and passive/victim 'womenandchildren' as one compound of victimhood, and the fact that most peace negotiations are still conversations between experts of violence (Weber 2018). Assessment of UN Sustainable Development Goal five on gender equality shows advance in some indicators, but insufficient progress on structural issues such as legal discrimination, unfair social norms and attitudes, decision-making on sexual and reproductive issues and low levels of political participation (Sustainable Development Goals Knowledge Platform n.d.)[4]. These challenges require deeper engagement in theory and practice of gender in peace and conflict.

Furthermore, it is relevant to get acquainted with a variety of terms associated with gender:

- **Queer:** umbrella term for LGBTQI community and an antinormative view on gender and sexual politics.
- **LGBTQI:** lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex people
- **Heteronormativity:** belief that heterosexuality is best and most natural form of sexuality (Kearney 2017)
- **Patriarchal ideology:** belief that males are superior to females and thus should have more power (Kearney 2017)
- **Binary/nonbinary:** use/resistance to dichotomy masculine/feminine
- **Ally:** Someone interested on transformation and who supports the mobilization of those claiming for being heard and for power.
- **Privilege:** refers to benefits derived from an unequal society, like playing downhill on an unleveled field (Collins and Bilge 2016). Examining privilege creates awareness around implicit bias, discriminatory practices and structural inequality that prevents the lived reality of equal rights for people depending on power dynamics entangled with identity markers (Murphy 2018, 278).
- **Positionality:** understanding one's location in a context and the conditions of a social situation in which a position arises (Murphy 2018, 278).
- **Toxic Masculinity:** Social and cultural norms around masculinity that perpetuate violence, misogyny and homophobia.
- **Gender mainstreaming:** a strategy for promoting gender equality, which "involves ensuring that gender perspectives and attention to the goal of gender equality are central to all activities - policy development, research, advocacy/ dialogue, legislation, resource allocation, and planning, implementation and monitoring of programmes and projects" (UN Women n.d.)

These definitions are alive and changing as people engage with gender and struggles for transformation. Therefore, it is crucial to keep oneself updated on the changes in the field by researching, studying, listening and discussing[5].

Why is gender relevant in peace and conflict?

It is estimated that 35% of women worldwide (up to 70% in some countries) experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or sexual violence by a non-partner (World Health Organization, Department of Reproductive Health and Research, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, South African Medical Research Council 2013, UNWomen 2019). This is one of many figures of gender-based violence that have devastating impact on the lives of women, and also

4 For more detailed information, see the report Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals (UN Women, Women Count and UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2019)

5 For more information on terms, see UN Women searchable gender-inclusive lexicon (UN Women n.d.) and GLAAD's LGBTQ Media Reference Guide (GLAAD n.d.)

affects girls, LGBTQI people, men and the wellbeing of communities and societies. According to a recent UNDP report, almost 90% of men and women globally are biased against women (UNDP 2020). This bias affects opportunities, rights, and responsibilities, perpetuating an inequality that puts women and other groups in disadvantage and justifies violence in all its dimensions against them. Initiatives like #MeToo, #NiUnaMenos, #TimesUp, #UnVioladorEnTuCamino denounce the degree of violence and suffering generated by gender inequality and gender-based violence and raise the voices of women and allies for transformation. Having gender as an encompassing lens allows understanding and changing deeper patterns of violence, protecting victims and supporting survivors, and setting the necessary changes to reduce gender-based violence, inequality and discrimination. It contributes to promote more equal, just, safer and healthier patterns of interrelation in personal, societal and global levels.

Reflection

- The feminist scholar bell hooks affirmed she came to theory out of pain, trying to understand the world around and within herself, and saw in theory a location for healing (hooks 1991, 1). How about you? What brought you to Gender in Peace and Conflict?
- Watch Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Talk "We Should All Be Feminists" (Ngozi Adichie 2012). In your opinion and in your context, why is it relevant to discuss Gender in Peace and Conflict? Do you agree with the title of her talk?

2
Complexifying Gender in Peace and Conflict

The fact that almost 90% of men and women globally are found to be biased against women shows the dimension of the challenge of gender equality (UNDP 2020). From the frontlines of war and armed conflicts, to domestic violence, structural oppression, cultural bias, and abuse of legal and illegal industries, the variety and intricacy of gender-based violence is present in different instances of life. Understanding how these violences are interconnected provide information and avenues to tackle them in a more systemic and transformative way. This chapter approaches more complexities of gender in peace and conflict, investigating the different layers of subjective identities, interrelational practices and social structures through gender perspectives, inquiring about the relevance of contextualization and subjectivity for understanding violence, conflict and political action.

The complexities and ambiguities that are present in a reflection about gender in peace and conflict are many. While women are reified as peacemakers, they are continually excluded from peace processes. While they suffer in war times, periods of crisis may as well mean more political space for changing social relations, as occupying roles that were once restricted to men (Pankhurst 2003). In this scenario, post conflict often means a threat to give up these new roles and return to previous ways of living that excluded them from political and social decisions. While women and girls suffer with abuse, rape and the traumatic consequences of it, they also endure the social stigma connected to being victim of sexual violence (Lederach and Lederach 2010, 147-169). The boundaries between victim and perpetrator sometimes also become blurred, as women find little choice between being victimized and engaging in violence, in what becomes a cycle of violence. On the other hand, women also have a significant role in the socialization of family members into sexist and violent expressions. Women receive less recognition for their roles in war and fight, for their roles as caretakers, social and political organizers, and receive less support in post-conflict reconstruction. It has also been pointed out that, besides inclusion in peace negotiations, women also need special training and educational opportunities as support for their participation in these instances (Pankhurst 2003, Weber 2018). In a sharp criticism against the ambiguities and a flatten approach to gender in peace and conflict, peacebuilding and development professor Donna Pankhurst argued that "women's suffering during war is held up as evidence of inhumanity by the same organisations that accept, if not promote, the marginalisation of women's needs during peacetime" (2003, 154).

Deeper understanding of the realities of women, girls, and other groups highlights the need for multifaceted, informed and strategic analysis and proposals of action. They need to consider not only one-off events of transformation, but a systemic understanding of the different layers and patterns involved in perpetuating violence and exclusion. When the lines between war and peace are revealed as a blurred distinction, warzones become less of a delimited space and more of processes in which tragedies of individual lives intersect with transnational realities (Nordstrom 1999). This means not only battlefields, but also the bedrooms where sexual violence is inflicted and the government halls where it is joked about and overlooked. Intricated in these dynamics of power are also legal and shadow industries profiting from war and peace. According to anthropologist Carolyn Nordstrom, shadow industries profit billions of dollars, amassing wealth and power to affect political and economic policy nationally and internationally, impacting millions of people. She exemplifies these networks with illegal pornography of war orphans, guns trade, gems and metal extraction and selling, but also all the industry that allows it to happen, from people feeding the teams to selling and buying the products. Nordstrom urges to scrutinize the invisibilities, asking: What is it that we are not seeing? (1999). While violence is inflicted in obvious ways by shadows industries, legal industries also take a toll in perpetuating violent colonial and patriarchal patterns and economic exploitation, including the development and peace industries (Pearce and Dietrich 2019).

Eco activist Vandana Shiva raised discussions on the blind spots of the development field by arguing that the very definitions of development and poverty under Western modern eyes are misguided. According to her, they are based on patriarchal understandings of productivity, wealth and growth that do not follow nature's sustainability, generating harm to ecology and women. She differentiated poverty from survival, arguing that culturally perceived poverty did not necessarily equate to deprivation, but could be a way of living connected to sustainability and cycles of nature, while deprivation and misery were often a result of development policies. She defended a feminist political project that legitimizes ways of knowing and being that create wealth by enhancing life and diversity rather than death as basis of capital accumulation (Shiva 2002). Her insights, while debated over the essentializing connection of nature, women and peace, point out to the impacts of unquestioned unilateral development policies, economic measures and legal industries on the everyday lives of people around the world. Furthermore, they highlight the harmful consequences of unchecked cultural values, norms and references as a normative and generalizing rule for encountering difference.

In a similar vein, feminist theorist Chandra Talpade Mohanty denounced colonialism and its intertwining in solidarity discourses within feminism (1984). She called attention to different ways of perceiving and making sense of the world, deriving knowledge and developing strategies for action. Furthermore, she criticized a limited understanding of Western feminism in determining priorities around which all women were expected to organize. She questioned the assumed globalized, generalist and homogenic understanding of the world and women through western eyes:

> *This average third world woman leads an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender (read: sexually constrained) and being "third world" (read: ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized, etc.). This, I suggest, is in contrast to the (implicit) self-representation of Western women as educated, modern, as having control over their own bodies and sexualities, and the freedom to make their own decisions (Mohanty 1984, 337).*

These biased perspectives render a projection of similar priorities on women all over the world, overlooking different realities, needs and potential. Mohanty questioned the paradigm of neutrality and apolitical scholarship and warned against the trap of considering a monolithic universal and ahistorical patriarchy, calling for understanding the power dynamics implied in a situated positionality[6].

Listening to different worldviews amplifies understandings and opens ways to promote shifts in violent discourses and assumptions, exploring different tools and skills for change and conflict transformation. Poet and writer Audre Lorde argued that the master's tool will not dismantle the master's house, calling for transforming the conditions and behaviors that replicate patriarchal exclusion (Lorde 1984). She criticized the institutional rejection of difference as a necessity of profit economy that perpetuates a binary of exclusion which leaves people with no patterns for relating to human differences as equals. Highlighting the life-giving energy and creative tension that lies in difference, Lorde stated that it is not difference which separates people, but reluctance to recognize those differences and deal with the distortions derived from misnaming them. She called for consciously working on the self as well as in social and structural change: "For we have, built into all of us, old blueprints of expectation and response, old structures of oppression, and these must be altered at the same time as we alter the living conditions which are a result of those structures" (Lorde 1984).

These old blueprints of expectation and response have also been called **implicit bias**. Open racist, misogynist, homophobic and other hate-based behaviors can be easily identified. However, the pervasiveness of structural violence, revealed in bias against women, inequal pay, racial biased hiring practices, or police more likely to use force

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6   For another nuance on this topic through the lens of race, see Cole (2012)

against black suspects, points toward another layer of racism and misogyny: implicit or unconscious bias that influence behavior (Mendoza-Denton and Adam Smith 2016). While structural change is urgent and necessary, changes within each person play a role as well in transforming conflicts and aligning intention and action.

In recent studies, researchers found that humans develop patterns of categorization based on life experiences of familiarity, in and out-group references and other social constructions with social significance that the nervous system tracks. Therefore, redefining the social environment may change these implicit responses. Among the actions suggested by the authors are: acknowledging unconscious bias as well as consciously committing to equality, broadening knowledge of and contact with people from groups different from your own social circle, and challenging bias whenever you identify them (Mendoza-Denton and Adam Smith 2016). Furthermore, mindfulness and compassion practices can help focus, developing better relationship with emotions, and increase ability to act out of intention and purpose. These practices, together with learning and discussion, may offer the sustenance to engage in social justice in personal, relational and systemic levels (Magee 2015, Magee 2019).

Direct violence, gender inequality, racism, homophobia, and other forms of violence have another layer of consequences that is **trauma**, which can affect individuals and communities in physical, emotional, cognitive, and spiritual ways, and impact relationships and generations as well. A holistic perspective on victims and survivors of gender-based violence asks for protection, health care and justice allied to social change of the root causes of violence[7]. Furthermore, from the perspective of the peace and conflict worker, it is relevant to develop and integrate strategies for trauma awareness and mechanisms of self-care and resilience for themselves, their teams and the populations they are working with.

The complexity of gender, peace, violence and conflicts can be overwhelming in their intertwining of personal stories and global connections in layers of subjective identities, interrelational practices and social structures. Acknowledging the blurring lines of war and peace reveals different forms of violence closer and within oneself, and this process can be painful. Self-care, trauma-sensitive and compassion practices, allied to a connection with a supportive community, can help navigate the emotional and cognitive unrest generated by looking at patterns of complex intricacies of gender, violence, and peace. This unrest may be exacerbated by seeing oneself involved in a possibly hybrid combination of victim and perpetrator of violent patters. But while this effort involves painful processes of understanding the dynamics and intricacies of violence, it also reveals practical ways of engaging in transformation in different levels, from one's own inner perspectives to relational and social engagement. This can be a liberating process with highly transformative potential.

Feminist scholarships have had an important contribution in questioning patterns and behaviors, encouraging reflection in and out of its circles, holding oneself and others accountable for perpetuating violence and also calling for being vehicles of change. Self-awareness becomes a relevant addition in the action for social change, through understanding of one's own locatedness in the web of relations that permeates the conflictive context.

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7   For more on this topic, see Yoder (2005), Geddes and DeWolf (2019), and the STAR resources (Strategies for Trauma Awareness and Resilience n.d.).

Artificial intelligence technology is one of the fields in which gender imbalance and stereotypes are perpetuated. The plethora of voice assistants associates female voices with receiving orders and servitude. Furthermore, it shows submissive and docile responses to sexual verbal harassment (EQUALS and UNESCO 2019). These biased stereotypes reflect problems in inclusion and representation in production teams, from unequal access to technological skills to an unquestioned normative identity despite diversity and plurality.

There have been, however, initiatives to change gender bias in technology. From the development of Q, the first genderless voice (Copenhagen Pride n.d.), to movements to push back against gender bias and sexual harassment of AIs (#HeyUpdateMyVoice n.d.).

Activity

Take a test at Project Implicit (2011). Suggest other people from your familiar and professional circle to take it as well, and discuss the impressions, similarities, differences, and implications of implicit bias. Furthermore, discuss ideas and ways of changing these biases.

Reflection

Watch Valerie Alexander Talk "How to Outsmart Unconscious Bias". What concrete steps can you take to transform your own biased actions and thoughts?

How can you contribute to make your workplace more diverse, inclusive and aware, shifting away from perpetuation of violence?

3
Intersectionality

The discussions on this chapter gravitate around intersectionality, identity and power, exploring the correlations between gender and cognate subjects such as race and class. How can intersectionality inform conflict analysis and praxis? How do the power dimensions related to gender and cognate subjects influence personal subjectivity, communitarian belonging, and social politics? How are similarity and difference negotiated in peace and conflict work? This chapter discusses the theory around the concept and proposes an activity for exploration of intersectional lens to one's own positionality.

Identity politics is the organizing of groups around identity markers for bringing forth understanding and change. It contributed to understand battering and rape from individual and isolated events to a social and systemic form of domination which affects women's lives. Law professor Kimberlé Crenshaw argued that for women of color, LGBTQI, and other minorities, identity politics has often meant a source of strength, community and intellectual development (1991). At the same time, identity politics has been criticized for ignoring in-group differences and creating tensions among groups. She illustrates that, in centering the categories of women and blackness around white women and black men respectively, feminist and black movements left black women's voices unheard, complicating responses to violences suffered by this group which intersect in the axes of race, sex, and class. The values associated to these particular categories foster and creates social hierarchies that need to be reflected upon and engaged with (Crenshaw 1991).

The concept of **intersectionality** is derived from experiences, practices and theories of black women movements. Kimberlé Crenshaw called attention to the ways in which race and sex intersect to shape the multiple dimensions of black women's experiences and saw intersectionality not as a threat to group solidarity, but as an opportunity to build coalition politics. Highlighting the impact of the disregard to the ways violence impact minorities differently, she argued that paying attention to those differences in politics and policy is not a superficial conflict over who gets what, but that it sometimes is a serious issue of survival. According to her, "through an awareness of intersectionality, we can better acknowledge and ground the differences among us and negotiate the means by which these differences will find expression in constructing group politics" (Crenshaw 1991, 1299).

Intersectionality has been defined by Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge as "as a way of understanding and analyzing the complexity in the world, in people, and in human experience" (Collins and Bilge 2016, 2). They argue that major axes of social division as race, class, gender, sexuality, dis/ability, ethnicity, nation, religion, and age are categories of analysis that operate not in exclusion to one another, but build on each other and gain meaning from power relations of racism, sexism, heterosexism, and class exploitation (Collins and Bilge 2016, 4-7). Intersectional analysis highlights the multiple nature of individual identities and how they position each individual differently in dynamics of power, putting into question a limited perception of meritocracy of winner and losers that justify social inequality. It asks for a shift from an either/or frame to a both/and frame, adding complexity to the analysis and potentially developing more alternatives for transformation. As core ideas of intersectionality, Collins and Bilge highlight: understanding social inequality, taking power relations into account, considering the relationality of aspects, investigating specific social contexts in which these factors constellate in complexity, and using intersectionality as a tool for social justice (2016, 25-30).

In consonance with feminist engagement in critique, it is relevant to highlight risks of intersectionality and its use in different fields. There is a risk of it being made into an ontological claim disconnected from the lived realities of people. There is also a risk of fostering competing and oppositional identities instead of creating solidarity and

coalition (Keating 2013). Furthermore, there is a risk of cooptation, using dividing categories without a commitment to social change (Collins and Bilge 2016, Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies 2019).

For peace and conflict, intersectional analysis has propitiated a sharpened view into interlocking systems of power and oppression, as well as into the entanglement of colonialism, neocolonialism and exploitative capitalism in the peace field, and its precedence from a neoliberal frame. Furthermore, it highlights the connection between the personal, interrelational and structural layers of violence, and the urge to focus on the socio-cultural, political and religious dynamics in place (Fitriyah 2016, Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies 2019).

Deriving from an intersectional approach is the responsibility for the history and power structures informing one's position in the web of relationality, and an urge for a continuous self-reflection of one's own positionality in a particular situation. It asks for a reflection on privilege and suffering, intention to speak from one's own experience, to listen to other's experiences and to engage in change and transformation opening space for other voices to be heard, particularly the ones of the survivors. It asks for shifting away from ideas of charity or savior complex to justice and transformation, acting strategically with others for transforming interconnected violences and promoting peaces that resonate in the context.

It is important to highlight that different locus of enunciation, or being in a privileged position, does not prevent reflection and engagement nor justify inaction for social change. While reminding not to speak in the name of others or for saving others, intersectionality calls for acting from one's own positionality, acknowledging the limits and potential in that location and using them as fuel for change, starting where oneself is. Professor of conflict transformation and peacebuilding David Hooker argued that an oppressive system constrains even those who get the benefits of it, and therefore there is work to do for all involved (Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies 2019). That does not mean doing work for others but cooperating for change. As discussed in the previous chapter, that also implies changing oneself in the process too.

> *"Change means growth, and growth can be painful. But we sharpen self-definition by exposing the self in work and struggle together with those whom we define as different from ourselves, although sharing the same goals. For black and white, old and young, lesbian and heterosexual women alike, this can mean new paths to our survival" (Lorde 1984, 123).*

Reflection 1

- Strategies for self-awareness and action
- Turn the 'internal observer' on, being aware of one's own thoughts, feelings, sensations, intuition.
- Listen to others, to stories, and get to know alternatives, initiatives, possibilities.
- Talk, learn, engage, be available and open for uncomfortable and important discussions.
- Start where you are.
- Connect, enter conversations being open to change as well[8].

Which of these strategies can be helpful in your work? Which ones do you already do well, and which ones need to be more practiced? Do you have other strategies for connecting self-awareness and action?[9]

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8   For more, see Deray Mckesson (2018) and Black Lives Matter toolkit (Black Lives Matter n.d.)

9   For more information and resources, check the
Hollaback! Resources for Harassment on the Street, Online and in the Workplace (Hollaback! n.d.).

Reflection 2

- Watch Tony Porter's Ted Talk "A Call to Men (Porter 2010)".
- Let Porter's question resonate with you: How would your life be if you did not have to adhere to the boxes that restrict you and your relationships into being superior or inferior to others?
- Considering your positionality in the web of relationality in the conflictive system, how can you be part of the transformation?

Activity

The previous discussion highlights the relevance of situating perspectives and understanding one's own locatedness and role in conflictive dynamics through intersectional lens. In this activity, you are invited to practice that engagement, reflecting on your context and understanding your locatedness and role within the topic of gender in peace and conflict. You are also encouraged to look at these topics with a broad understanding, exploring connections in intrapersonal, communitarian, societal and global layers, having your own perspective as the connecting thread.

- How have experiences with gender, race, class, nationality, ethnicity touched and/or transformed you?
- How do your understandings/experiences of gender relate to your inner and interpersonal relations? What are the implications of these connections and frictions in your life?
- How do you deal with the contributions, challenges and implications of these experiences in your life and as a peace and conflict worker?
- What is your positionality and locus of enunciation (and that of your institution, if it is the case) in the conflictive system you find yourself in? What are the privileges and violent patterns you find intertwined there?
- What are your differences and similarities with other people?
- What are your biases, and how can you act upon them?
- What are your sources of power and energy?
- What is your locatedness in the subjective, interpersonal and global layers of gender in peace and conflict?
- What transformative and healing processes can you put in motion, in yourself and in your community, for conflict transformation?

These questions can be used to provide greater self-knowledge, and to inform your analysis and action plan, as they are intended to contribute to understand your locatedness, your gender positionality within the field of gender in peace and conflict, and reveal motivations, strengths, power, limitations, challenges, and potentials to analyze and transform the situations you are engaging with. This approach is based on the understanding that peace and conflict workers are not outside observers but are part of the conflict system they want to transform. As part of it, their actions directly impact the system, and they have the possibility to contribute to the transformation of conflicts. Therefore, you are invited to look at the conflict context being curious and aware of your own perspectives and how they shape your understanding of the conflict, investigating potential transformative processes to put in motion.

4

Social Change in the interrelation of vulnerability and power

Previous chapters explored key discussions in gender in peace and conflicts, and the complexities in the field that intertwine personal stories with global dynamics. Intersectionality was discussed, and the suggested activity explored one's own position in the intersections of identities, power dynamics, and web of relationships in the conflict system. This chapter follows the investigation of intersectionality along with interconnectedness and relationality, exploring how they can inform potential avenues for transformation in the layers of subjective identities, interrelational practices and social structures. Vulnerability and power emerge as two main topics in this discussion: How do vulnerability and power move and unfold in contact points of the different and shared identities? How can interconnectedness and relationality inform transformation stemming from the seat of vulnerability and power? Drawing on feminist thinking and peace studies, this chapter explores how to harness the vulnerability and power nested in interconnectedness for social change.

Intersectionality proposes seeing things in relation to each other, rather than apart or competing. It helps seeing intricate patterns of violence and locating oneself within it, becoming aware of one's own biases and patterns of perpetuated and suffered violences. This exercise encourages accountability and responsibility for one's acts and decisions (which is different from guilt and shame), helping identify ways for personal and collective healing and change. Furthermore, a focus on relations reveals the interconnectedness of oneself with everyone and everything else. Besides making the intricacy of patterns of violence explicit, it can also reveal the potential lying in the net of relationships in the system and one's own unique position to contribute for change in the crossing of multiple identities, experiences and relations.

Poet and writer Audre Lorde stated that she felt the most energized when embracing all the parts of who she is, not selecting one over the other or hiding her blackness, womaness, queerness or any other aspect. She argued that:

> *My fullest concentration of energy is available to me only when I integrate all the parts of who I am, openly, allowing power from particular sources of my living to flow back and forth freely through all my different selves, without the restrictions of externally imposed definition. Only then can I bring myself and my energies as a whole to the service of those struggles which I embrace as part of my living (Lorde 1984, 120-121)*

In line with Virginia Satir's approach to conflict discussed in chapter 1, Lorde argued that our differences are not the problem, but the way we often deal with them: by fearing, ignoring, copying the dominant and destroying what is labelled as subordinate. This misnaming and mishandling of difference contributes to trap power in the dominant form, and results in confusion, separation, and violence. She called for developing patterns to relate across human differences as equals, acknowledging difference as a source of energy in the interplay of polarities which spark creativity. In equality across differences and mutual creative tension, interdependence then stops being a threat to be a source of power for existing together and acting in this world. Envisioning a society in which each one can flourish and together foster energy and creative insight for transformation, Lorde called for identifying new forms of power and relating, and for developing "(…) tools for using human difference as a springboard for creative change within our lives" (Lorde 1984). Instead of seeing differences in an either/or frame, a both/and approach allows sustaining seemingly paradoxes in creative tension, pollinating alternatives and creating new ways of relating.

In the peace and conflict field, professor of international peacebuilding John Paul Lederach also highlighted the interdependence of people who are not like-minded and not like-situated in the conflictive scenario as crucial in the web making process of social change. His metaphor derives insights from spiders and their web making to describe the weaving of relational webs which connects people across social spaces within settings of protracted violent conflict. A relationship-centric approach finds in existing and to be created spaces of intersection the pulsating energy for social change, that which nurtures inward and at the same time propels outward for action. The quality of these spatial intersections derives from the presence nurtured in it and the flexibility to adapt to the ever-changing context which keeps sets of people in interaction. These intersections then become platforms from where creative responses are elicited (Lederach 2005, 78-86).

Spiderwebbing finds resonance in feminist practice, and has often been a strategy for resistance, survival and thriving under violent situations. In feminist theory, Gloria Anzaldúa's relational approach resonates with this spider webbing. Using the metaphor of a spider women spread across worlds, hanging by one strand of web, she positions herself on thresholds (Keating 2013, 87-88, Anzaldúa 2012). By dwelling in the intersections of different worlds, she breaks through narrowly defined identities and rigid boundaries and reveals their interconnections.

Anzaldúa argued that borderlands are not a simple divide in nations, but a psychic, social, and cultural terrain that we inhabit, and that inhabits all of us. In line with Audre Lorde, she identifies in dualistic thinking (an either/or frame) and its hierarchization a source of violence and imprisonment. According to her, the process of shifting this dualistic thinking from individual and collective minds involves engendering a new consciousness, which Anzaldúa called a mestiza consciousness. While warning that this can be a painful process, she also acknowledged the energy for creative motion that derives from it (Anzaldúa 2012).

Anzaldúa's relational approach to commonalities and differences challenges narrowly defined identity categories, engages complexity, and calls for a holistic concept of selfhood which fosters connection (Keating 2013). This connection is based on vulnerability, on the vulnerable openness to acknowledge the different parts of the self in the rawness of experience and in its complexity, twisting binarity. Vulnerability does not mean making oneself passive for violence or abuse, nor condoning it, but allowing oneself to be seen in its many layers, as an imperfect being with one's own conflicts. It implies accepting uncertainty and navigating ambiguity. This vulnerability opens space for that creative energy to unfold as power to connect and to transform. For Anzaldúa, this process translates as a spiritual activism, a kind of activism based on the belief of a radical interconnectedness among all beings (Anzaldúa 2012, Keating 2012).

The sense of this spiderwebbing comes from cultivating presence and relationships beyond the episodes of tangible conflict, sustaining a vibrating energy embedded in the interconnectedness of life. The structures of power are not disregarded, ignored or overlooked, but the perspective is enlarged to include further dimensions of human subjectivity and relationality, opening space for being differently and acting together for change.

This power does not negate the materiality of oppressive power. It fosters action in a way that does not feed into oppositional entanglement, but on the contrary weakens its stance by opening up different ways of relating. In conflict transformation, Dietrich argued that one alternative offers no choice, two alternatives is a dilemma, and three or more present potential for transformation, because it is not locked into dichotomic reference (Dietrich 2013, 9). Activating different lines of relating and exerting power based on vulnerabilities and plural ways of being foster a multiplication of alternatives which facilitates transformation and the flourishing of more meaningful and life-serving ways of relating. It means engaging with oppressive and violent patterns for transformation, not allowing them to define the self and the relationship anymore.

Drawing on the work of M. Jacqui Alexander, Jennifer Murphy argues that: "This involves crossing into metaphysics of interdependence without undercutting historical

contextualization, individual/collective experiences and situated materiality of power" (Murphy 2018, 266) It asks for multiplying the tools for engagement beyond the master's tools (See chapter 2). This crossing asks for opening up to different forms of knowing and incorporating them into the landscape of perception. Rational thinking is complemented by other ways of knowing, such as sensing, feeling, intuiting and witnessing, which contribute to add further layers of understanding, to being present with the complexities of the world, and to further imagine and create differently (Koppensteiner 2018).

Facilitating conflict transformation implies engaging with the conflicts present in oneself, in the relations and reverberating in the system. This is not, however, free of tension or pain, as self-knowledge processes and awareness of self in connection to a larger we and the cosmos entails friction, engaging with difference, and changing oneself in the process of transforming conflicts. Murphy argues that decolonizing and analyzing intersectional systems of oppression is part of the process, and states that it also has to make room for a yearning for wholeness, for belonging (2018).

Echoing Lorde, Anzaldúa and Murphy, there is a need to infuse political activism and mobilization with a sense of wholeness and belonging, to contact the energies that emerge with being vulnerable and open to that self in work in free flow of all its manifestations together with others. There is also a need to direct that energy and stand in one's own power, using one's voice for transforming harmful and violent realities. These are not two separate or oppositional movements. As has been pointed out earlier both in feminism (Collins and Bilge 2016) and in elicitive conflict work (Lederach 2003, Dietrich 2013), a shift from an either/or paradigm to a both/and opens room for alternatives that are not revealed in oppositional dichotomy. A both/and approach invites to sustain seemingly incompatible stances in creative tension, sparking energy that can be directed with purpose to unfold peace and promote social change.

Crossroads, webs, platforms and springboards offer metaphors for relation-centric approaches to social change. Internal crossroads and external intersecting webs constitute interconnected and plural spaces of tension, which can be cultivated as platforms that nurture connection among different people and springboard creative responses for social change.

The process of self-awareness and action finds resonance in what compassion researcher Kristin Neff calls the yin and yang of self-compassion. In its yin form, self-compassion asks for comforting, soothing and validating experience, being with oneself and embracing one's suffering in the interconnectedness with other beings who share that experience as well. In its yang form, self-compassion entails protecting, providing and motivating, acting in the world, saying no to what causes harm and yes to what is life-serving. Arguing that women need fierce self-compassion, Neff highlights that "We need love in our hearts so we don't perpetuate a cycle of hate, but we need fierceness so that we don't let things continue on their current harmful path" (Neff 2018).

Reflection

Watch Brené Brown's Talk "The Power of Vulnerability (Brown 2010)" and Marina Abramović' "An Art Made of Trust, Vulnerability and Connection (Abramović, 2015)".

• In your life and work, how are vulnerability and power present? How could they inform potential avenues for transformation in the layers of subjective identities, interrelational practices and social structures?
• How do vulnerability and power move and unfold in the contact points of your different and shared identities with others?
• How does interconnectedness and relationality inform your life and work? What insights into transformation do/can they reveal?

5

Transformative perspectives on gender in peace and conflict

This final chapter builds upon the previous discussions on gender in peace and conflict, and looks at more concrete aspects of transformation, indicating sources and proposing complementary insights and questions for reflection exploring possible themes, tools, processes, as well as potential avenues of action for contextualized transformation.

In order to prepare to dive into exploring potential alternatives and actions for change, it is relevant to recall a definition to conflict transformation:

> *Conflict Transformation is to envision and respond to the ebb and flow of social conflict as life-giving opportunities for creative constructive change processes that reduce violence, increase justice in direct interaction and social structures, and respond to real-life problems in human relationships (Lederach 2003, 14).*

Shifting from a search to a definitive solution to envisioning and responding to social conflicts as opportunities invites embracing complexity, sustaining paradoxes in a creative both/and tension. A systemic view is of significant relevance. Conflict transformation involves gathering knowledge and data, asking questions, studying theory and listening and discussing different perspectives. It requires critical engagement, as well as considering what is possible in utilizing as a way going forward. It asks for going beyond the "lack of something" and implied homogeneous narratives of future, to an investigation of the potentials already in place, exploring how to cultivate multiple narratives and visions of a shared future where plurality coexist (Hooker 2016, 17). Conflict transformation asks for upholding complexity, looking at the energies of the conflict, the ones evident in the conflict episode, and the subtle ones in intrapersonal and interrelational layers approaching the epicenter of the conflict (Lederach 2003, 32). Furthermore, a gender analysis asks for understanding and checking the power dynamics and structures, history and experiences of each actor in the system, including oneself, calling to explore ways to tap into the crossroads of the web of relationality, using the creative tension of these spaces of encounter to springboard transformative responses to conflict. Deriving its potency from encounter, a transformative approach to conflict inevitably asks to shift from unilateral implementation to exchanging and building ways together, sustaining the spaces of encounter as the platforms from where creative alternatives emerge.

In consonance with conflict transformation, initiatives for peace, justice, education and healing also are often present in the conflict scenario. In some perspectives, initiatives connected to creating and developing constructive relationships across boundaries are identified as part of peacebuilding efforts. The quality of a connecting space has been used by peace researcher and practitioner Lisa Schirch to describe strategic peacebuilding, which, according to her, involves a wide variety of processes that:

- seeks to prevent, reduce, transform, and help people recover from violence in all forms.
- empowers people to foster relationships at all levels that sustain them and their environment, from families to governments and institutions.
- supports development of relationships at all levels of society (relationships are a form of power or social capital) (2004, 9).

Within this concept, many initiatives that may potentially contribute to peace can be identified, such as education, economic development, justice systems, and conflict transformation[10]. According to Schirch, peacebuilding requires a combination of approaches through nexus of collaboration, and is strategic when resources, actors, and approaches are coordinated to accomplish multiple goals and address multiple issues for the long term (Schirch 2004, 8-11).

With inspiration of these concepts of conflict transformation, strategic peacebuilding and the idea of connecting spaces, the following exercise proposes guiding questions to reflect on and plan actions for conflict transformation through gender lens. They are suggested as complementary insights to other existing toolkits on conflict transformation, peacebuilding and gender analysis. An initial list of indicated toolkits can be found in the section Suggested Literature.

Reflection

Watch Leymah Gbowee's talk "Unlock the Intelligence, Passion, and Greatness of Girls (Gbowee 2012)", and proceed to the activity.

Activity

Choose a topic that instigates you, something that generates discomfort, touches you in different levels, and that you would like to gain clarity about and explore potential transformation. It can be something as personal as having a conversation with a family member or co-worker about gender issues, or a broader action as analyzing gender dynamics in your organization or region/topic you work with or facilitating spaces of conversation about gender with local partners. You are encouraged to explore the situation and potential avenues for transformation.

You are invited to work with aspects of complexity, vulnerability and power with yourself, and, importantly, with those involved with you in the conflict situation. You are encouraged to explore history, dynamics of power, experiences and identities, and also to look beyond rigid dichotomies of oppressed/oppressor, colonized/colonizer, good/bad, and developed/underdeveloped, exploring relational ways of engaging with difference and using it as a springboard for transformation.

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10 A visualization of components can be found in Lederach and Mansfield's Strategic Peacebuilding Pathways (Lederach and Mansfield n.d.)

Questions for Assessment

Intrapersonal reflections

- What is a situation that touches you and that you would like to transform?
- Why does this situation bother you?
- What is you locatedness (gender positionality) in it? Who are you (and your organization) in the conflict system? What and how can you (and your organization) contribute to transformation?
- What are the potential and limitations related to your locatedness (and that of your organization)?
- Who are your relations and what are the connecting spaces which you sustain, participate or have access to? How can your participation in them contribute to the efforts to transform this conflict?

Inter-relational reflections

- Who are the people involved, what is their locatedness and relations?
- What are the existing notions, identities, roles, structures, and relations of gender, power, peace and conflict that most influence the situation? How do they differ and resemble yours and your organization's notions? Are there connecting threads among these notions? Can they be developed?
- What are the local ways or tools for conflict transformation? What could be possible and appropriate in this specific case for transformation?
- Who could you reach out to in order to create a participatory dialogue?
- Which frames, tools, and theories could you use to engage with the other actors to start the transformation process? What adaptations are needed to make them context-specific?
- What are possible impacts and risks to consider?

Self and collective awareness, reflection and care

- How are you going to include self and collective reflection and assessment in the process?
- Who is the community you can reach out for support and nurturance? How can you cultivate these qualities of nurturing spaces within your team and partners in your context as well?
- What are the practices of awareness and self-care you need in the process and how can you implement them in your daily routine?

> *The peace and conflict worker "(…) who stays close to the own lived experience also is less likely to forget what ultimately is at stake in all investigations of peace, conflict, war or violence: concrete hwuman lives, their wounds, their healing, transformation and unfolding" (Koppensteiner 2018, 77).*

Suggested Literature

These are initial recommendations of toolkits on peace, conflict and on gender in peacebuilding. It is certainly not an exhaustive list and there are many other helpful materials available online. Furthermore, UN Women has a digital library with many publications that can be helpful.

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