

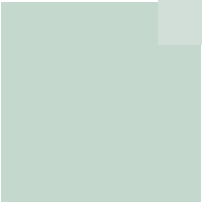
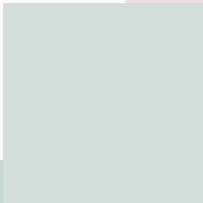
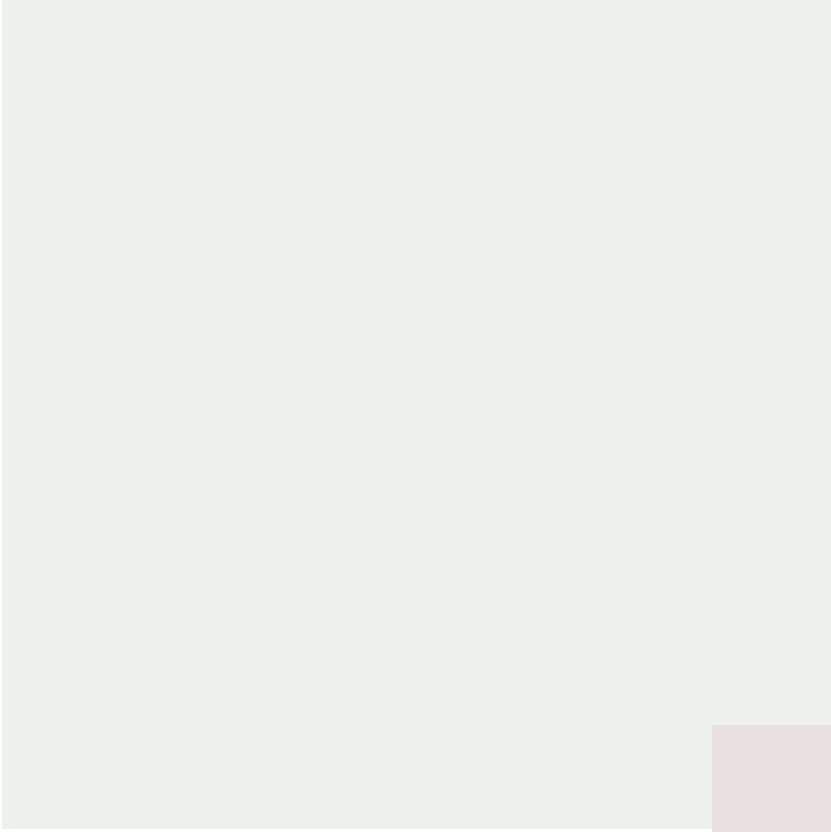


Section 4

Gender, armed conflict and the search for peace



A WOMAN SALVAGES BELONGINGS FROM THE WRECKAGE OF HER HOUSE DESTROYED DURING CONFLICT. GROZNY, CHECHEN REPUBLIC, RUSSIAN FEDERATION



Some of the armed conflicts and states of pervasive violence that proliferated unexpectedly after the end of the Cold War have abated in the 10 years since 1995, but others continue in as brutal a form. To these are added the acts of multilateral military intervention under US leadership which, since 9/11, have been justified within the framework of a worldwide “war on terror”. These new types of war, associated less with formal battlefield confrontations than with the breakdown of order, livelihood systems and social norms have particular impacts for women, both in their persons and in their socially constructed roles.

During the past 10 years, the recognition in the early 1990s of sexual assault as a weapon of war and a crime against humanity has been further concretized in international humanitarian law; a few cases have even been successfully prosecuted in postwar tribunals associated with Rwanda and former Yugoslavia. At the same time, increasing attention has focused on women’s roles in conflict resolution and peace building, and in helping bring into being the transitional or “new” institutions of state emerging in the postconflict environment. Much needs to be done to consolidate a “gender-friendly” peace, so that women are not forced back into the very roles and disadvantages that were part of the social and political circumstances out of which armed confrontation originally emerged.

The first chapter in this section, “The impacts of conflict on women”, examines the multiple and sometimes contradictory ways in which women are affected by armed conflict, while the second chapter, “After conflict: women, peace building and development”, looks at the challenges of post-war peace building as well as the potential for positive change in women’s ability to seek justice and exercise rights.





Chapter 13

The impacts of conflict on women

Ten years after the Beijing Conference, the world is still enduring an epidemic of armed violence, with 19 major conflicts¹ and many more smaller-scale violent confrontations ongoing in different parts of the globe. Although the number of major conflicts is lower than in most of the years since the end of the Cold War, the decline in armed confrontation and warfare optimistically anticipated at the beginning of the 1990s has never effectively materialized. Some wars have ended; however, not only do many continue, but the changed circumstances wrought by the 11 September 2001 attacks on the United States and the subsequent “war on terror” appear to have left the world more prone to unpredictable armed violence than before. The problems of addressing the causes and implications of conflict in the lives of ordinary people, including and especially women, have accordingly become more complex.

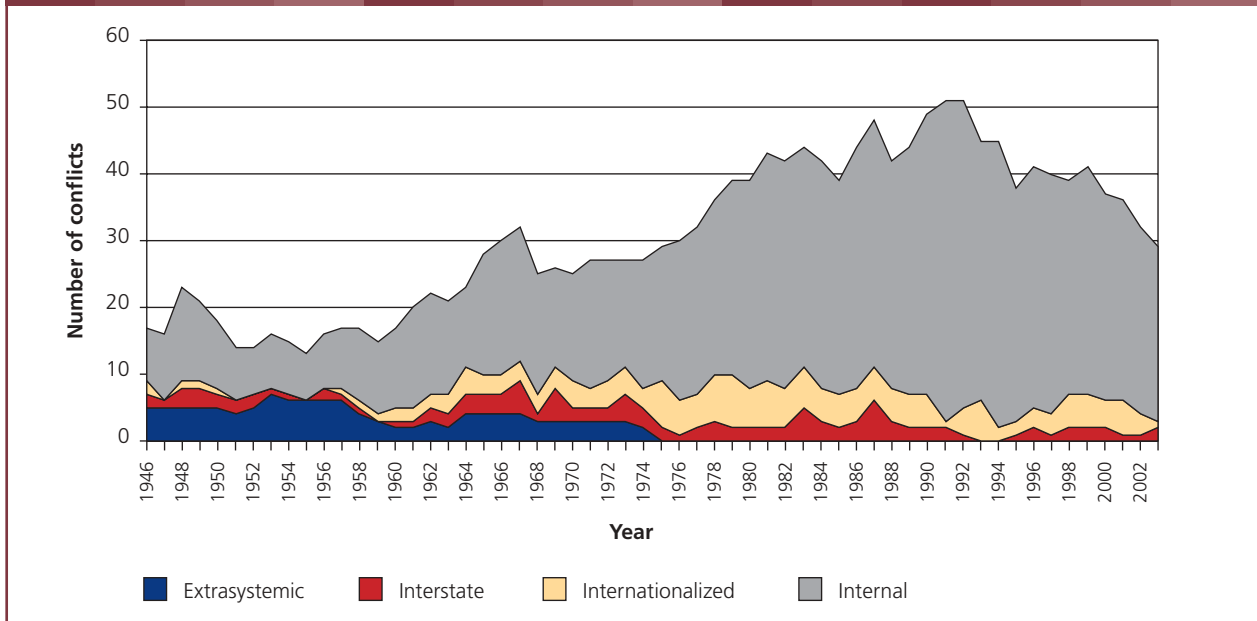
The end of the Cold War saw changes in the forms and arenas of armed violence. Some conflicts or armed political confrontations earlier fuelled by the global competition for strategic allies between the two superpowers of East and West came to a negotiated end. However, new wars were also unleashed by the relaxation of controls held in place by the long era of superpower stand-off, such as those in the former Yugoslavia. Several ongoing conflicts—Kashmir, Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)—are holdovers from the postcolonial period, continuing in new mutations. Yet others derive from internal contest over territory or resources between local clan or ethnic leaders, as in Burundi, Somalia and Indonesia; or are armed insurrections against the state, whose fortunes ebb and flow but which fail to reach a conclusive end, as in Sri Lanka, Chechen

Republic and Colombia. Most of these conflicts are internal or “civil” wars: only two of the 19 major conflicts underway in 2003 were interstate (the US/UK-led invasion of Iraq, and India–Pakistan over Kashmir); but interference or involvement from external powers or interests is common (see figure 13.1).

The dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) led to a reduction in the prospects of mighty clashes between organized national armies using sophisticated aerial, battlefield and nuclear weapons; this was the image of war which dominated most of the 20th century, with guerrilla warfare emerging more strongly in the Viet Nam war and African liberation struggles. Subsequent geopolitical developments, including the rise of US unilateralism, have opened the door to new kinds of external military interventions: onslaughts from the air against a nonconformist or outcast state, or military invasions whose nominal purpose is to end gross violations of human rights or restore order. The complex crises of the 1990s and early 2000s have witnessed the evolution of comprehensive external interventions, often under the rubric of UN peace building. Their objectives—peace, stability, development and accountable governance—have become steadily more ambitious, wide-ranging and trusteeship-like than in the past; the 2002 intervention in Afghanistan is a classic example.² These interventions, often with the involvement of forces from many nations in military and nonmilitary roles, is yet another important element in the confusing picture of today’s conflict and postconflict situations.

At stake in today’s wars are not only territories, but ethnic and religious identities, control over natural resources such as oil and minerals, and control over lucrative and sometimes illicit

Figure 13.1 Type of conflicts in the world (1946–2003)



Note: Extrasystemic armed conflict occurs between a state and a non-state group outside its own territory. Interstate armed conflict occurs between two or more states. Internationalized internal armed conflict occurs between the government of a state and internal opposition groups with intervention from other states. Internal armed conflict occurs between the government of a state and internal opposition groups without intervention from other states.

Source: UCDP/PRIO 2004.

trade, such as in drugs and arms. Tensions have been exacerbated by economic crises and their accompanying social distress; growing wealth gaps between regions and nations; and the weakness of state institutions in the face of impoverishment and civil unrest. A common feature is the assertion of ethnic, religious and racial allegiance, overlaying political and economic malaise. In a world in which the balance of power is lopsided, and where many people feel economically or politically vulnerable, these bonds of common identity often provide a powerful mobilizing force.

In the playing-out of these forces, women's role is subsidiary to that of men, since their influence over power structures and decision-making leadership is minimal. They occasionally gain an emblematic prominence in exceptional guises, such as suicide bombers or "mothers of martyrs" (the two may even be combined). But as a group, women's explicit role in waging war and influencing military outcomes is marginal, even if a few have exercised important influences on their commander-spouses,

privately, behind the scenes. They have also been important as cheerleaders, challenging men to behave courageously in battle, and helping to shape notions of honour and masculinity by conferring female approval on the warlike male.

WARFARE AND WOMEN

When contrasting today's wars with those of previous generations, it is common to cite the statistic that whereas 80–90 per cent of casualties in the First World War were military, around 90 per cent of the victims of today's conflicts are civilian, of whom the majority are women and children.³ Although the accuracy of these statistics is questionable, and it is probable that there is some confusion between "casualties" and "victims", they do indicate important changes in the way war is experienced by ordinary people, by men and women alike but especially by women (see box 13.1).

The distinction between a “war front” on some distant battlefield exclusively occupied by men, and a “home front” where women carry on daily life as closely as possible to “normal”, if it was ever accurate, has eroded.⁴ No longer is there a separate sphere where women are kept away from hideous sights, carefully cocooned with children and dependants to mind the hearth while husbands, fathers and sons face the heat of battle. War can permeate whole areas and embrace their entire populations, or can persist in alternating high-intensity and low-intensity forms as “fronts” move unpredictably through contested terrain. These situations may last years or even decades, waxing and waning as different parties enter the fray or different armed groups achieve temporary ascendancy.

Conflict zones in today’s wars embrace homes, markets, cafés, workplaces, trains, theatres, temples and schools: almost nowhere can be considered a reliable safe haven. Just as the

venue of war has become diffuse, so have the actors. National armies—in which women are present in numbers that are small but larger than they used to be—still play an important role, especially in external interventions. But many wars are fought by informal fighting forces rather than organized armies. Their active perpetrators comprise a variety of state and nonstate actors, including private militias, paid mercenaries and criminal groups, indicating a “privatization” of violence.⁶ For example, in the battle for autonomy in the state of Kashmir in India, at least a hundred different groups are now engaged in fighting the Indian State, some also fighting each other.⁷

The degree to which women play a role in these informal fighting forces varies greatly; but the idea of their total absence from the battlefield is now discredited. Feminist researchers have identified active participation by women in wars historically, not only as camp followers, carers and providers, but as

Box 13.1 Data on women affected by armed conflict

There is relatively little sex-disaggregated data on the impacts of armed conflict; and indeed the difficulty of collecting data in any conflict zone means that there is usually little dependable data at all. A recent review of conflict-associated mortality and injury data by World Health Organization (WHO) experts and others points out that information services break down during warfare, and uncertainty prevails concerning death and disability statistics.⁵ Situations are fluid, populations ebb and flow rapidly according to events, security is limited, and priorities for relief personnel lie elsewhere. For these reasons, surveys cannot be undertaken; those that do exist are limited to particular populations in special circumstances, and do not form a reliable basis for extrapolation. Reported figures of deaths from conflict or conflict-related causes are therefore always estimates and may be biased; all data of this kind is politically charged and may have been developed for propaganda purposes. Statistics such as that 80 per cent of camp populations are women and children, or that indirect deaths from war are in a ratio of 9:1 to direct deaths, are not based on empirical evidence and should be treated with caution.

WHO is now attempting to improve methods of assessing mortality, disability and morbidity in conflict and postconflict environments. UN bodies, as well as human rights organizations, are trying to assess levels of sexual violence against women, and to collect data among the populations of camps for the displaced and refugees. There is a growing recognition that women refugees have different needs and vulnerabilities than men, and that sex-disaggregated data, and information about female-headed households and family dependency within refugee populations, are important. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and key emergency relief non-governmental organizations (NGOs) attach a higher priority to refugee registration and documentation than in the past; without registration, refugees have no rights, effective protection and assistance is difficult to offer, and families cannot be reunited. WHO has also set up a database on violence against women and its effect on women’s health, and is conducting a multicountry study, but the emphasis here is primarily on domestic violence.

Source: *United Nations 2000b:156–7, 162–3.*

combatants. More recently women have trained and fought as “freedom fighters”, in Nicaragua, Viet Nam, Sri Lanka, South Africa and southern Sudan.⁸ They also play important subsidiary roles in resistance movements and insurrections, acting as couriers and spies, providers of refuge and care for the injured. Sometimes they are acting in these supplementary military roles under coercion, but many female participants also sign up to a military life voluntarily.

Fighting methods

The means of fighting the wars of today also have strong social repercussions. Aerial bombardment invariably involves “collateral” deaths—of unarmed civilians, even if deliberate civilian onslaught from the air is now less common than in the first half of the 20th century. The spread of conflict has also been fuelled by the proliferation and burgeoning worldwide trade in small arms. Around 1,250 companies in more than 90 countries (predominantly Europe and the United States) are currently producing small arms and light weapons.⁹ Stockpiles of government-purchased small arms are vulnerable to looting and dispersal among the population, and may be sold on very cheaply. In 1997, the loss of control over Albanian arsenals led to an increase in the fighting in neighbouring Kosovo and Macedonia.¹⁰ In 1991 in Somalia when the government collapsed, hundreds of thousands of firearms found their way into the hands of warring clans. In Iraq, in the wake of Saddam Hussein’s defeat, civilians took possession of an estimated seven to eight million small arms; every household in Basra had up to four guns.¹¹

The profusion of weapons makes possible the rise and sustenance of militias and gangs; these use them not only for shoot-outs, ambushes and obvious acts of war, but for criminal purposes, to settle old scores or carry out revenge killings. Where order has collapsed and the police force is unable to function, civilians are exposed to personal insecurity. Rape in wartime and related contexts often occurs under the threat of a gun.

Meanwhile some 100 million landmines are thought to be endangering life in different conflict terrains around the world. Not only do these cause death and maiming, they also put large

areas of agricultural and grazing land out of bounds. This means that women and girls going to the fields for work, or to collect fuel or water, are put at risk.¹² Terror tactics which create widespread fear, render land and homes unusable or uninhabitable, and which destroy sacred buildings and monuments, are all deployed in the new wars, made easier by the ready availability of small arms and explosives.¹³

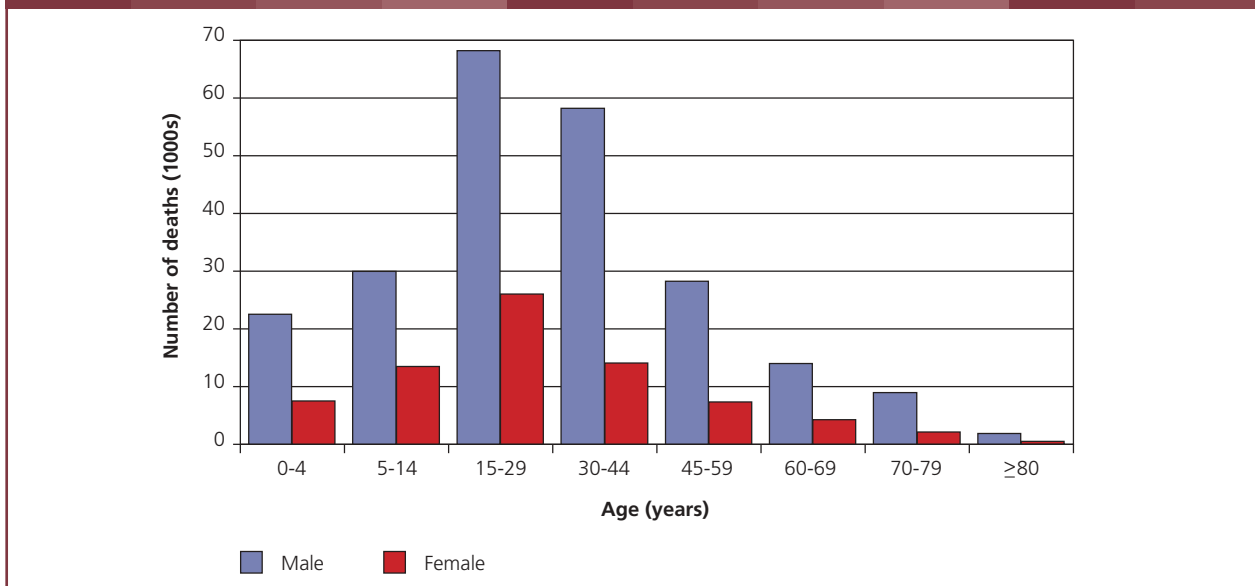
The infestation of violence helps to foster fear, hatred and insecurity, brutalizing attitudes and damaging interpersonal relations. Ethnic or faith groups previously intermingled within communities and neighbourhoods, and within families by marriage across clans, communities or religions, are often forced by the diktat of local “commanders” into warring camps. The emotional hurt and psychological trauma stemming from the experience of atrocities at the hand of previous neighbours and friends reaches a level which is very difficult to cope with when “peace” is restored.¹⁴ The descent into internecine clan war in Somalia forced many women who had married out of their clan to leave their husbands and children, and travel long distances to their fathers’ or ancestral home areas for safety.¹⁵ Relationships so sundered may be impossible to repair. Many mothers in exogenous marriages have lost their children for good, and as a result marriage in Somalia today is more often within the clan.

WOMEN AS DIRECT VICTIMS OF WAR

The violence of war and conflict affects everyone in its vicinity. These impacts are differentiated by many factors, in which age and gender loom large. While women are seldom among the instigators of wars and conflicts, they rank high among their victims, both in their own persons and in their socially constructed or gendered roles. Their experience of conflict tends to be markedly different from that of men, in the contexts of both agent and victim.

Until recently there has been a tendency to emphasize women’s victim roles and downplay their agency; but the changing nature of conflict and the evaluation of contemporary warfare from a feminist perspective have begun to fill in a far more

Figure 13.2 Estimated age and sex distribution of deaths due to conflicts in the year 2000



Source: Murray et al. 2002.

complex picture of women’s activity in war and its implications for them. They are, in this view, both more actively involved and associated with defending the society at war and sustaining its fabric, and more openly exposed to its brutality, and sometimes complicit in it. The recognition that mass rape may be used as a “weapon of war”, and that sexual assault is routine as a corollary of the fighting culture, has emphasized the direct vulnerabilities faced by women in situations of pervasive insecurity. These phenomena can be seen as symptoms of the generalized exposure to violence of entire populations.

Far from being protected or “immunized” by their feminine status, women may be especially targeted in the endemic violence that engulfs many theatres of fighting. In wars arising from social and economic inequality, identity or religious difference, women are assigned involuntarily to the side of the dispute to which they are deemed to belong by family, kin or faith, whether or not this reflects their personal sense of identity. The targeting of wives and children of fighting leaders for kidnap or assault has been routine historically. Cases have recently been reported in eastern DRC of women being buried

alive by local villagers, ostensibly because they were believed to be witches, but actually because they provided food and medicine to armed groups the villagers did not support.¹⁶ In conflict zones in sub-Saharan Africa and elsewhere, women face personal danger every day, as they scour the environment for food, water and fuel. In eastern DRC, a UN official reported to independent experts from the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM): “Women take a risk when they go out to the fields or on a road to a market. Any day they can be stripped naked, humiliated and raped in public. Many people no longer sleep at home. Every night there is another village attacked, burned and emptied.... always they take women and girls away.”¹⁷

Mortality and loss

The number of deaths among men is higher than those among women, as is shown by figure 13.2. However, deaths among women from injury are higher than might be expected. In 2000

alone, conflicts are estimated to have resulted in 310,000 deaths by injury, with more than half taking place in sub-Saharan Africa, one-fifth in Southeast Asia, and the rest in the Balkans, Central Asia and the Middle East.¹⁸ While the highest mortality rates were among men aged 15–44, a quarter of direct mortality was among women, with the highest number being among women between the ages of 15–29 (26,000 dying of direct causes).

Thus the region where women suffered worst was in sub-Saharan Africa; in this region, where the brutal and vicious forms of violence experienced by rural people has been exceptional and a cause of special concern,¹⁹ sudden raids and attacks on villages are a common pattern. This puts women especially at risk, as times when the men are absent may be chosen deliberately as good moments to launch an assault. This is indicated by the testimony of many survivors of attacks on villages in West Darfur, Sudan in a study undertaken by Amnesty International in early 2004. One stated: “Only women and children were in the village, the men were with the cattle a bit further north, closer to the hills. When the attack occurred, men ran up the hills in order to see and the women ran into the village to take their children and flee south of the village.”²⁰

A high proportion of deaths also transpire as a consequence of flight and population disruption. As was noted earlier, one estimate of deaths in war suggests that there are nine indirect deaths for every direct death, among which women and children constitute a high proportion; however, like almost all war-related statistics, there is no empirical basis for this figure.²¹ These are deaths from hunger, exposure, exhaustion, infection or epidemic disease, or some combination of these exacerbated by injury or trauma. The mortality rate among war-torn populations is much higher than usual. When civil war restarted in Congo in late 1998, a third of Brazzaville’s population—about a quarter of a million people—fled into the forests, where they remained trapped for several months without access to aid. Their death rates soared to five times the level regarded as the emergency “alert threshold”.²²

Estimates by the International Rescue Committee in DRC show that between August 1998 and April 2001, there were 2.6 million excess deaths in the five eastern provinces where armed groups were attacking one another. Of these, 350,000 were directly caused by violence, 40 per cent of which were

among women and children; the remaining excess deaths were from disease and malnutrition.²³

Widowhood

While their survival chances from injury may be higher, women have to absorb the loss of husbands, fathers and sons with all the attendant emotional and psychological pain, and cushion the effects of loss for other dependent family members, including children. Demographic estimates suggest that up to 30 per cent of the population in war-torn societies may be widows.²⁴ The predicament of war widows can be acute. They are strongly associated with the increase in female heads of household common during war;²⁵ but they can face particular difficulties compared with those whose male partners or household members have temporarily departed to fight, or have disappeared or been detained. Support from the family may traditionally depend on reassignment as an extra wife to a brother or other family male; a life at the economic margins may be the only alternative. In places where widows can own or access land they may be forced to sell it if they are cash-constrained and thus unable to hire labour and purchase inputs. Issues relating to female land ownership and access are highly significant in postwar settlements (see chapter 14).

That there is such a large number of widows in a population engulfed in conflict may relieve the individual effects of stigmatization, where that is traditionally felt; widows may even manage to change social attitudes towards them and wring concessions from the authorities. However, widows’ needs for economic and social support might not be met willingly. Even in countries where pensions and benefits are theoretically in place, they might be denied or difficult to access. In situations where the husband has disappeared without trace, this problem can be compounded. In the northern Indian state of Kashmir, there are large numbers of women who are known as “half widows”. These women are not able to produce proof of a vanished male provider in the form of a dead body or some other formally accepted evidence. In such cases the woman is not technically considered a widow, a status that would qualify her to receive certain kinds of state assistance.²⁶

The experience of war widows is not invariably negative. Tamil war widows in Sri Lanka have shown a courageous independence of action and become a “liberated” group within a highly conservative society. A Sri Lankan study describes a generation of widowed women as: “challenging conventional Hindu constructions of widowhood as a negative and polluting condition which bars their participation in many aspects of community life.”²⁷ These women have redefined what it means to be without a spouse in the South Asian context; many have sought a newfound independence, access to the public world, and to employment if urban opportunities are within reach. Here is another example of the contradictory experience of war for some women: a triumph of social transformation stemming from predicaments of extreme distress.

Targeted sexual assault

I was sleeping when the attack on Disa started. I was taken away by the attackers, they were all in uniforms. They took dozens of other girls and made us walk for three hours. During the day we were beaten and they were telling us: “You, the black women, we will exterminate you, you have no god.” At night we were raped several times. The Arabs guarded us with arms and we were not given food for three days.

A refugee from West Darfur Sudan, interviewed in Goz Amer camp, Chad, May 2004²⁸

The use of sexual violence in armed conflict has been recorded since ancient times, but it has recently gained a much higher profile. Evidence exists for sexual assaults on a wide scale in postcolonial conflicts. During the Partition of the Indian subcontinent into India and Pakistan in 1947, an estimated 100,000 women were raped, abducted and forcibly married.²⁹ Rape was also used strategically in Korea during the Second World War, and in Bangladesh during the 1971 war of independence.³⁰ However, it was not until the mass rape of women in Bosnia and Herzegovina received worldwide media attention in 1992, followed by that of between 250,000 and 500,000 women

during the Rwandan genocide in 1994, that rape was acknowledged as a weapon of war. Subsequently, far more official and unofficial reporting of war has focused on the issue of sexual violence, and it has emerged as a characteristic of hostilities in Afghanistan, Algeria, East Timor, Liberia, northern Uganda, Sudan, DRC, Somalia and elsewhere. Rape seems to be on the increase in conflict,³¹ but such is the silence that has previously surrounded the issue that trends are difficult to assess.

The circumstances and forms of sexual violence are many and can be extreme. They include the rape and torture of women in front of their husbands; the use of rifle barrels and knives; attacks on pregnant women and their unborn foetuses; the mutilation of breasts and genital areas; and other horrors which women are barely able to confide. Some women and girls have endured repeated gang rapes; some have survived “rape camps” where they were imprisoned and suffered systematic sexual assault.³² Rape used in this way demeans and humiliates not only the woman herself but the people or clan to whom she belongs. In Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia, rape was used as a strategy to subvert community bonds and even as a tool of “ethnic cleansing”.³³ The violation of women’s bodies, and of their sexuality and reproductive functions, in this way becomes an extension of the battlefield.

For the women victims, the impact might not only be physically and psychologically devastating, but lead to divorce, family rejection or social ostracism. In many cultures rape is deeply shameful for the woman and polluting for her family. Somali women do not confess to having been raped because social rejection and divorce will follow. Palestinian women resistance fighters who have been imprisoned have been rejected by their communities upon release, whether or not they have actually been violated. Some Iraqi women victims of rape, or women who have been imprisoned and assumed to have been violated by their captors, have subsequently been divorced or even killed.³⁴

A study in Sierra Leone carried out by Physicians for Human Rights estimated that war-related sexual violence had been suffered by 11 per cent of female household members; 8 per cent reported rape, but a number of others reported abduction, and/or became pregnant or experienced vaginal bleeding, pain, swelling or had some kind of sexually-transmitted infection

Box 13.2 Rape as a tool of Somali clan conflict

Between 1991 and 1994 thousands of Somali women were subject to rape and assault as a component of interclan conflict. These atrocities were unprecedented in Somali history. Traditionally, feuding and conflict in Somali pastoral society were bounded by social codes which protected women, the elderly, the sick and children from attack, or at least ensured retribution. These rules were abandoned during the conflicts which erupted in 1991, in which women and other nonfighters were attacked with impunity by militias and individuals, a cause of profound and lasting shock to Somali women.

Many women escaped to Kenya where sexual violence continued in the refugee camps in which they took shelter. Here, since they constituted 80 per cent of camp populations, they were insecure and exposed to attack by marauding groups of Somali gunmen (*shifita*). Human rights activists uncovered assaults on a large scale, and UNHCR undertook a full investigation. The following is an excerpt from one of the interviews conducted in the camps with 192 rape survivors.

In July 1992 nine *shifita* (bandits) with guns came into my house at night. They were wearing black trousers, black jackets and hats pulled low. I did not know them. They all had guns and big boots like soldiers. They pulled my arms behind my back and tied my hands. They told me not to scream and pushed knives into my upper arms and head. They kicked me with their boots. They told me to give them all the money I had. I traded at the market during the day and they must have followed me to know where I stay. After they tied and cut me I gave them the money which I had buried in a safe place. Then three of the men caught me and dragged me into my house and raped me. One man raped me while another held a gun at my head and told me he would kill me if I made a noise. My daughter of 10 years woke up and cried and they beat her on the head with guns. Up to today she has [mental] problems. I tried to shout but the *shifitas* shot in the air and so people ran away.

Source: Musse 2004.

(STI), indicating coercive sex to which they did not admit for fear of stigma. Most of these victims had been raped and one-third had been abducted; some had been forcibly married, and a few had become pregnant.³⁵

According to a report commissioned by the Reproductive Health for Refugees Consortium, estimates of war-related rape and sexual assault in Kosovo ranged from 10,000 to 30,000. However international health and human rights organisations including the Centers for Disease Control, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe and Human Rights Watch have been unable to verify the actual number.³⁶ Such is the “metallic silence” and taboo on rape that very few cases were ever reported. It is common for such pregnancies to come to term without medical help, in Kosovo as in Liberia, Bosnia and Sierra Leone; many mothers are subsequently outcast by their families, as are the children.

Forced marriage and sexual slavery

Populations in areas ravaged by war, where previously strong social norms of protection for the defenceless can no longer be relied upon, are very conscious of the threat to women’s honour. In Afghanistan, where civil war has continued for over two decades, households which previously sent young daughters away to marry a kinsman in another region because of fear of possible abduction or forced marriage by the Taliban, have adopted this course of action as a protective strategy against the predations of young armed men forcibly taking brides.³⁷

There is evidence from other conflict zones that parents try to pre-empt sexual assault on their daughters by marrying them off at a very early age; or they may resort to the “sale” of a young daughter into marriage as assets become depleted.³⁸ In camps for the displaced in Burundi, for example, surveys showed that

55 per cent of girls married at an earlier age than before; in the troubled countryside, the figure was 18 per cent.³⁹ Somali refugees from minority communities reported that girls as young as 13 were forcibly abducted, and married to militia “commanders”; such marriages may be arranged with families as the price of a family’s “protection”.⁴⁰ The UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women reported in 1998 that forced marriage and forced prostitution were among the human rights violations perpetrated by the Indonesian security forces in East Timor.⁴¹

Sexual slavery, or keeping women in captivity to provide sexual services to soldier combatants, is another abuse of women during conflict. “Comfort women” were forcibly recruited from Malaysia, Indonesia and Korea by the Japanese army during the Second World War, and have since unsuccessfully sought reparations from Japan. In northern Uganda, a systematic campaign of abduction and kidnap of girls by the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) has been underway since the mid-1990s. The abductees are known as “wives” or “helpers”, but are used as sexual and domestic slaves. They are allocated to soldiers as a reward for good performance, a source of prestige and a proof of status: the higher the rank within the LRA, the greater the number of allocated “wives”. When those who escaped were medically examined, nearly 100 per cent had STIs.⁴²

Other sex-associated vulnerabilities

All conflict zones show a marked increase of STIs and often of HIV/AIDS. The high rate of STIs is caused by the sexually predatory behaviour of soldiers, local marauders, militiamen and also of peacekeeping forces. The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), which focuses on soldiers as one of many groups at risk of STIs including HIV, states that STI infection rates among armed forces are generally two to five times higher than in civilian populations, but that in time of conflict, the difference can be 50 times higher or more.⁴³ There are many instances where HIV has appeared on an epidemic scale in a civilian population after the presence of an army in the vicinity, either encamped or passing through. In Rwanda in 1992, infection patterns of HIV were high in urban areas (27 per cent of pregnant women attending antenatal clinics) but only 1 per cent in rural areas. By 1997, the demographic upheaval following the 1994 genocide had led to near-equivalence of urban and rural rates.⁴⁴ Since health data are difficult to collect in conflict zones, the association between HIV spread and conflict is difficult to show categorically, but it is fairly widely accepted. In Rwanda, infection with HIV during rape was an expressed intention of some Interahamwe militias.⁴⁵

Box 13.3 Abducted girl mothers and babies

In Northern Uganda and Sierra Leone, girls who have been kidnapped to be used as forced wives of bush “commanders”, and become mothers of their babies, are highly vulnerable when they return to their communities. The children themselves are often stigmatized, lack basic health care, food, shelter and clothing; their mothers have difficulty providing for them, and attachment disorders between mothers and babies can affect their ability to thrive. On their return to their communities, the stigma involved in having given birth to the child of a rebel commander—a stigma even greater than that of having suffered sexual abuse—may lead the girls to hide and avoid attendance at clinics and programmes where their situation would be revealed. The babies may not be accepted in the communities, or even by the mothers: they are seen as the “rebels of tomorrow”. A UNICEF/Government of Uganda psychosocial assessment team recorded many statements confirming these attitudes: “The young mothers do not like the unwanted babies; many of these mothers are young and want to go to school but they can’t because of the kids. Flashback of their attacks torment many of these young mothers” (young man in Adjumani, northern Uganda, 1998).

Source: McKay and Mazurana 2004.

The problem of STIs in women is exacerbated by the prevalence of rape, and by the number of women who sell sex during times of severe distress as a means of survival. The demand for sexual services, especially in the presence of external armies or UN peacekeeping forces with money to spend, rises just at a time when there is acute need to find the wherewithal to live and keep a family going. A workshop on the social consequences of the peace-building process in Cambodia held in Geneva in 1992 pointed out that the growth of the “rest and recreation” industry had impacted on both women and children, with children increasingly being drawn into the sex trade.⁴⁶ The independent experts of UNIFEM, reporting in 2002, described this as a phenomenon in several conflict zones they visited, including DRC, Sierra Leone, Cambodia and former Yugoslavia. Radhika Coomaraswamy, the former UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, has called on the United Nations to take active steps to prevent peacekeepers’ involvement in sexual violence against women and punish it where it occurs.⁴⁷

Although the definition of trafficking remains controversial, situations of war and conflict seem to be associated with an increase in trafficking of people, especially women and girls. This is partly because social upheaval and lack of functioning legal systems or law enforcement provide good cover for this lucrative trade; there is also an association between the destruction to economic life and the penury to which families are reduced, and their resort to drastic means of survival by trading themselves or their children. The lack of proper border controls during conflict has helped create an environment in which the trafficking of women has flourished.⁴⁸ The rate of trafficking is estimated to have risen 50 per cent between 1995 and 2000. Much of it derives from countries subject to turmoil and its attendant economic stress; the majority of trafficked persons are thought to be women, many destined for prostitution, according to the International Organization for Migration (IOM).⁴⁹ In war-torn Colombia, just as one example, an anti-trafficking organization believes that as many as 50,000 women are being trafficked annually out of the country (see also chapters 7 and 10 for an elaboration of the controversies surrounding human trafficking).⁵⁰

WOMEN AS MILITARY PARTICIPANTS

Although armed violence is commonly regarded as a male preserve, women have long taken on active military roles in wars and revolutions. Their active role as fighters has received more attention in the recent past, especially since the advent of woman suicide bombers among the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE) in Sri Lanka, in the Palestinian intifada, and among Chechen insurgents. Women performed as freedom fighters in the African liberation struggles of the 1970s and 1980s in Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Namibia; also in Nicaragua, Viet Nam, and in South Africa where they were trained and fought along with men in the African National Congress (ANC) forces.⁵¹ Some women combatants are coerced into carrying arms or working for military commanders; yet others are inspired by identification with the cause in which war is being waged by kin and identity groups. Their participation is not limited to revolutionary and radical causes: chauvinist or nationalistic movements include women among their active members and principal cheerleaders. Women’s agency in conflict situations can grow in a variety of different political contexts—democratic, revolutionary and authoritarian—and in strong as well as weak states.

A considerable amount of attention has been given in recent years to the recruitment and use of “child soldiers”, both in organized forces and in militia bands. This has been made much easier by the development of light-weight, easy-to-use automatic weapons. Most of these child (under-18) soldiers are boys, but by no means all. Between 1990 and 2003, girls belonged to fighting forces in 55 countries, and took part in fighting in 38 of these countries where internal armed conflicts were underway.⁵² Many were abducted and forced to serve as fighters, or in other roles; in the internal wars of Africa where girls’ presence in armed groups is most common, the idea that many participate voluntarily is disputed since they may have no realistic alternative.

Women played a role as combatants and political supporters in the civil conflicts in the Central American countries of Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua. At the height of the Sandinista effort to topple the regime of President Anastasio

Somoza in Nicaragua from 1977–9, women made up 25–30 per cent of the combatants;⁵³ in subsequent years, they continued to play a central role in the transition from armed struggle to governance. In El Salvador, where better statistics are available, the United Nations Observer Mission (ONUSAL) estimated that women made up 29 per cent of the combatants, and 37 per cent of the political cadres. In Guatemala, the Guatemalan *Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca* (Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity, or URNG) data show that women made up 15 per cent of the combatants and 25 per cent of the political cadres (see figures 13.3 and 13.4). Interestingly, women in Guatemala did better out of the peace settlement than did those in El Salvador, partly because the settlement came six years later and reflected the growing awareness of women's rights as well as civil society pressure.⁵⁴

In the ongoing Maoist armed rebellion in Nepal, one-third of the guerilla cadres and around half of the middle-level leadership are believed to be female.⁵⁵ These figures are based on interviews with the Maoist leadership and anecdotal evidence and cannot be confirmed, but appear likely. Nepal is a poor, rural and mountainous country and the Maoist rebels are based in the poorest and most remote areas. Most rural areas contain few men, since they have migrated either to the capital, Kathmandu, in search of work, or to other towns and cities across the Indian border. Women are left behind to farm, maintain the family and somehow make ends meet. The state is virtually absent, and in many communities the Maoists are the only providers of administration, services or security that people know. It is therefore no surprise that their ideology is attractive, and that women, facing grinding poverty and hardship, enter the guerilla cadres and make a significant contribution to their numbers.

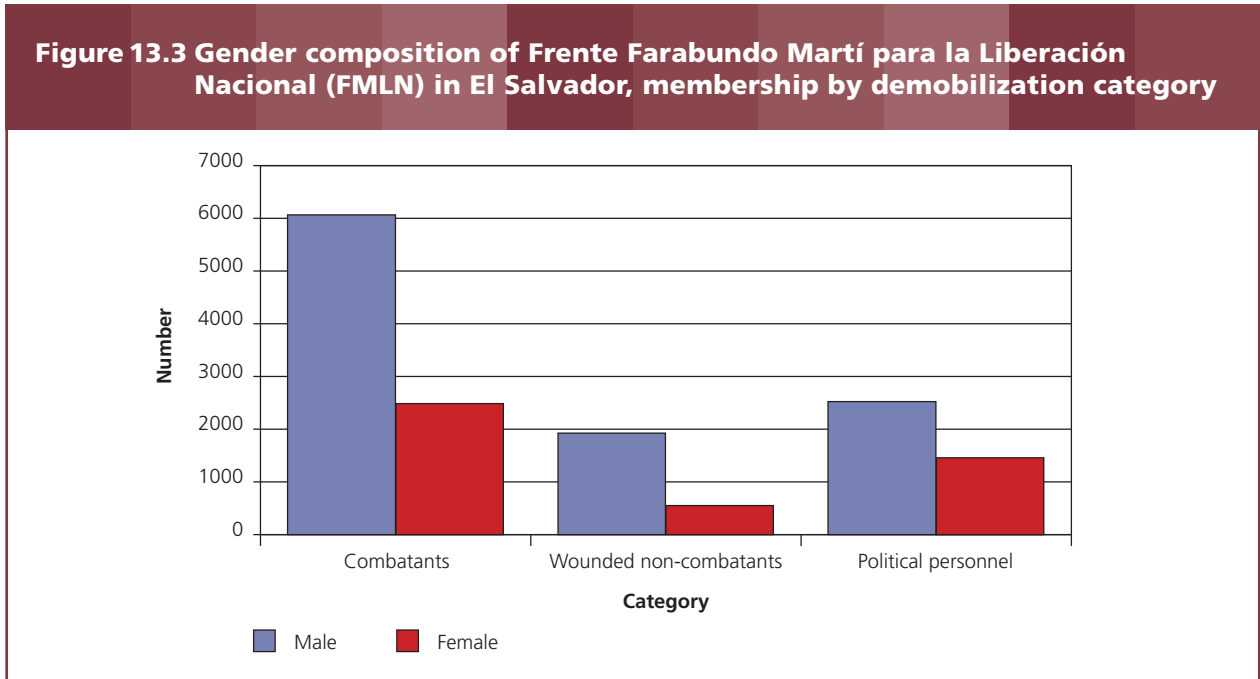
Cases of women participating in warfare as active supporters and provocateurs of fighting forces have also been reported from a number of countries, including northern Uganda and western Sudan. One example is the al Hakkamat of Darfur, who have a traditional role as praise-singers and cultural performers, as do women's groups in many countries of the region. In recent attacks carried out by the Janjaweed militia on local villages, Hakkamat have been reported as accompanying the male fighters, ululating and singing songs to encourage them,

declaring that local African villagers will be driven out and “our cattle will be in their land”. According to testimonies collected by Amnesty International, Hakkamat women play the role of communicators during attacks and, although not actively involved in combat, participate in acts of looting; in some instances, they have been known to watch their men while they rape other women.⁵⁶

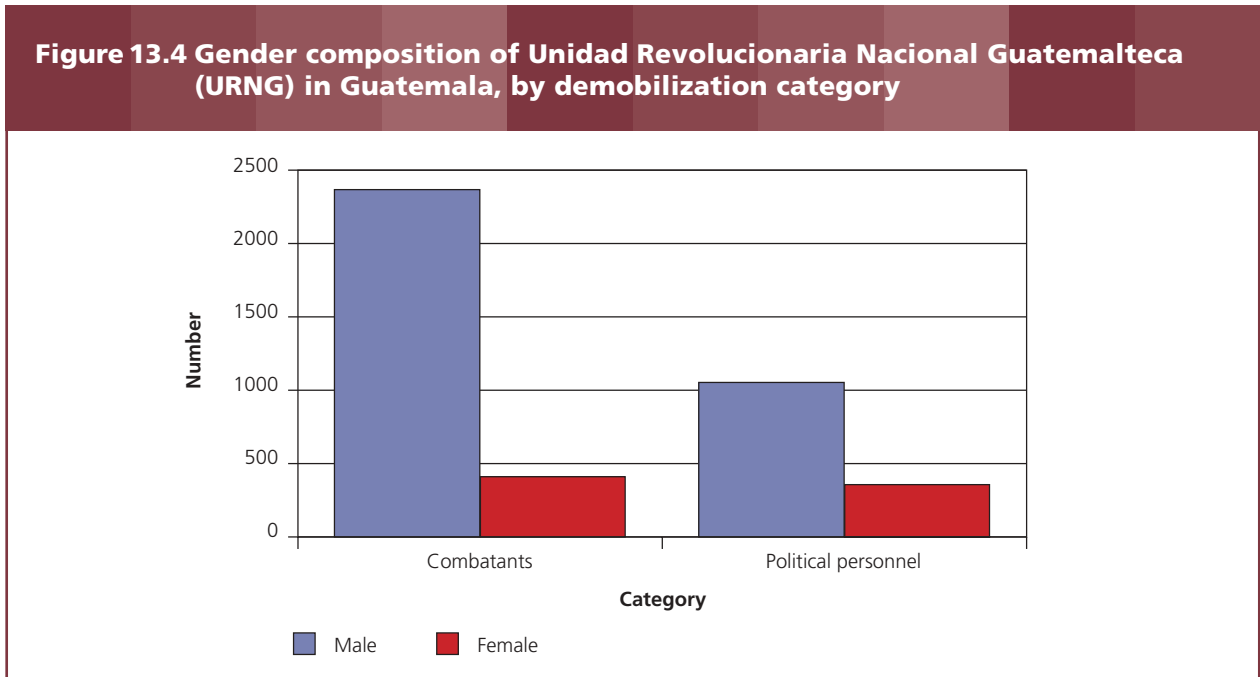
WAR'S EFFECTS ON WOMEN AS SOCIAL ACTORS

During their course, and as a consequence of changes in ruling authorities and power relations, war transforms the way societies function in fundamental ways. Especially if they continue for a long period, they destroy the economy in the area they pervade, and alter its key structures, including the modes of livelihood, means of survival and active providers. These changes have important ramifications on gender relations. Women may on the one hand lose professional and business occupations and be plunged into poverty, as happened in Bosnia and Herzegovina; they may lose access to land, or to workable land, as in many African conflicts such as Angola, Rwanda and Uganda. On the other hand their efforts to survive may lead them into new ventures, and even—in the context of the international and non-governmental relief aid effort—give them training and access to jobs as teachers, health and social workers. Many feminist observers have pointed to a pattern of gaining social, economic and even political rights for the first time, even if this comes with the shouldering of burdens which are barely supportable.

In their caring roles as social providers, women also have to assume extra levels of responsibility; these come from the fact that they may be separated from their homes, and from other family members, especially men who normally act as principal providers, protectors and heads of household. Additional burdens may also derive from the collapse of services, especially of health services, in the fighting vicinity. The impacts of service loss may affect them personally, but it is primarily in their roles of carers for their children, for the elderly and infirm, for orphans or other family members entrusted to their care because of death or injury,



Source: United Nations Observer Mission in El Salvador (ONUSAL) cited in Luciak 2004.



Source: URNG 1997 cited in Luciak 2004.

that the lack of support mechanisms for daily life is particularly stressful. Epidemics of infectious disease or shortages of nutritious food cause the most havoc in small children; women and their older daughters have to carry the burden of disease and hunger in the family, seeking out relief feeding programmes and taking the children in; or else sustaining the responsibility for their loss.

The impact on health and health services

Women's own health is put at risk from heightened exposure to STIs, physical and psychological damage from rape, and from lack of reproductive care. They may have to give birth without medical assistance or in conditions of extreme distress, such as flight. The care of children and other family members who are sick or infirm is more difficult even than usual, and they also have to tend the injured. These functions often have to be carried out in circumstances where clinics have been destroyed and looted, health professionals have vanished, there is a general lack of medicine and equipment, and fighting may have put medical assistance beyond reach. A 1992 UNICEF report on the situation of Afghan women and children described how "A few women of the poor neighbourhood had assembled on the rooftops and were discussing health care facilities in the area.... The women were distraught with their daily problems of survival and were not able to talk about anything else."⁵⁷

Their caring and family provision roles exert pressures on women which may have additional implications for their health. There is strong evidence that women frequently reduce their own food intake to protect the nutritional status of other family members, such as able-bodied men or children, depending on cultural norms.⁵⁸ In some conflict areas or in the exigencies of camps for the displaced, foods known as "famine foods" which are only consumed at times of severe food insecurity may be introduced into the diet. Such "famine crops" as cassava (eaten in West and Central Africa) have a poor nutritional content and require extra time and labour spent on preparation to ensure that toxicity is not a threat.

Doctors and medical personnel often flee as their conditions of work become dangerous. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, 40 per cent of physicians and 30 per cent of nurses left the country during the war. In Rwanda, over half the health workers were killed during the genocide, the infrastructure was destroyed and administrative capacities disrupted.⁵⁹ In Uganda, between 1972 and 1985 half of the doctors and 80 per cent of the pharmacists left the country.⁶⁰ In such circumstances, women are forced to devise their own health care systems and apply whatever remedies they know. Those who have had minimal experience as traditional birth attendants are called upon in refugee camps to assist in deliveries, and many become involved in trying to establish basic health facilities and other social services, such as children's feeding centres, psychosocial counselling services, and schools.⁶¹ UNIFEM's independent experts enquiring into the consequences of war for women found a number of ways in which their sex and gender additionally compromised their state of health and access to services.⁶²

Displacement and exile

We received an official document for refugees. They explained to us our status, rights and how to get help. That's the moment when I became aware of my loss. I lost my homeland and my personality.

A Bosnian woman refugee⁶³

Populations are often forced to move en masse when violence and insecurity escalate. These moves, both internal, within the borders of the same country, or external, across national boundaries initially to neighbouring countries, are often devastating for those involved and put huge pressures on host populations and authorities. Those who move within their own countries are known as "displaced"; those who leave their countries and cross borders are designated "refugees". In some parts of the world, notably in parts of sub-Saharan Africa where

national borders divide ethnically contiguous people, these designations are more bureaucratic than real. The figure of 80 per cent has been commonly cited as the proportion of women and children in refugee and displaced populations; recent analysis shows that the proportions of men and women above the age of 18 are approximately equal.⁶⁴ However, women make up a smaller proportion of asylum applicants: many are young males who leave refugee camps or their country of origin, leaving women to follow later.

According to UNHCR the numbers of those currently designated refugees rose from 2.4 million people in 1975 to 14.4 million people in 1995. By the end of 2003 the global refugee population had gone down to 9.7 million people.⁶⁵ The US Committee on Refugees, however, which includes the internally displaced in its calculations, estimated a rise from 22 million in 1980 to 38 million in 1995, of whom around 50 per cent were displaced.⁶⁶ One estimate of trends suggests that the number of refugees per conflict has roughly doubled since 1969, from 287,000 per conflict to 459,000 per conflict in 1992. The increase in internally displaced persons is higher, from 40,000 per conflict in 1969 to 857,000 per conflict in 1992.⁶⁷ UNHCR estimates that about half the world's refugees are women, and that they represent a higher proportion in the older age groups⁶⁸ (see figures 13.5 and 13.6).

Statistics mask the extent of human suffering endured by families broken apart, homes and belongings lost, older and younger family members unable to survive long and dangerous journeys, and lives repeatedly disrupted and remade. "In 1984 we were forced to flee. Myself, I took nothing thinking that we would return next day to peace and quiet. However, it lasted for months and months. In the country where we sought refuge, we suffered terribly—no house, no food, almost everyone was sick. Children were dying day by day," reported a refugee from Chad.⁶⁹ Refugees and the displaced are usually accommodated in camps, where conditions are cramped and unhygienic, food, water and medical assistance may be in short supply, and schooling and other services may not be available. However, it can also be the case that the camp is the first encounter for women in extremely poor countries, such as Afghanistan and Somalia, with modern medical and reproductive services,⁷⁰ and that women gain in

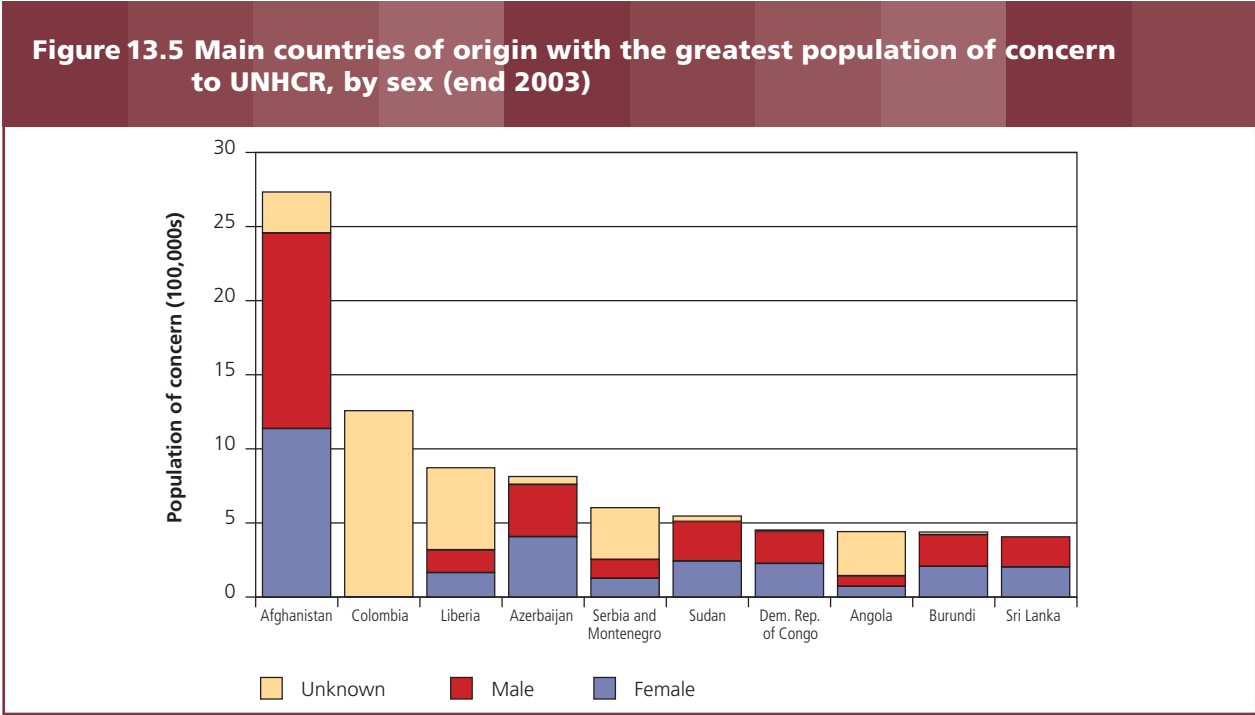
literacy and personal empowerment:⁷¹ the displacement experience cuts both ways.

The trauma of loss, anxieties concerning people, property and lands left behind, and the psychological effects of having witnessed slaughter and destruction, can take a heavy toll. The experience of being a refugee, with its inevitable dependency and sense of personal disempowerment, can cause serious depression. Camps for the displaced are also breeding grounds for disaffection and rage. They provide recruitment opportunities for agents of violence and terrorist groups; they can also lead to tension and conflict with host populations. Where women and children predominate in the camps, as is common in most African conflicts, women are also vulnerable to attacks from external bands of marauders, or from security personnel or refugee "commanders" within them. Their predicament was brought to international attention in 1993, when sexual atrocity on a shocking scale in camps sheltering Somali refugees in northern Kenya was brought to light by international human rights organizations and the UNHCR.⁷² The need of women and girls for personal security in all refugee camps is now treated much more seriously.

The lack of privacy, the difficulties of managing children in camp conditions and of maintaining family health, the lack of hygiene and the personal insecurity exacerbate the difficulties of the refugee experience for women. Health-related problems can be compounded. A study of Somali refugees indicated that up to 70 per cent of women of reproductive age were anaemic, probably because of a lack of iron in the diet, or because of malaria which depletes the body's stores of iron.⁷³ Epidemics of diarrhoeal disease due to poor sanitation and inadequate water supplies are also common among camp populations. For example, among the 500,000 Rwandans who fled into DRC (then Zaire) in 1994, almost 50,000 died in the first month from diarrhoeal infections. The death rates were highest among children under five, and among women.⁷⁴

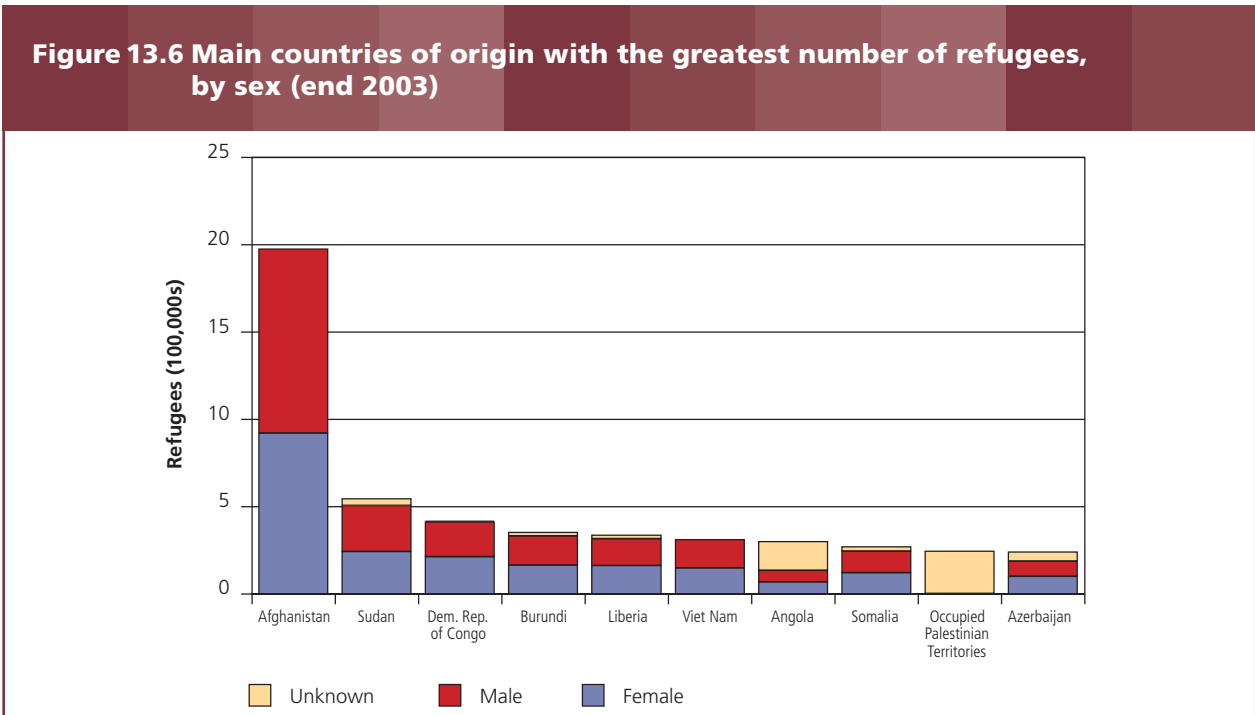
Providers and workers

Within camps, the supply of food and other basic necessities is rarely regular or sufficient, and women may need to supplement it by selling keepsakes or establishing some kind of petty trading



Note: Population of Concern to UNHCR includes the 6 following categories: Refugees; Asylum-seekers; Returned refugees; Internally displaced persons (IDPs); Returned IDPs; Others of concern to UNHCR; Refugees/asylum-seekers; Various/unknown. The total population of concern from the main countries of origin does not necessarily represent their actual total number because data regarding some of the countries of residence are not available.

Source: UNHCR forthcoming.



Note: The total population of concern from the main countries of origin does not necessarily represent their actual total number because data regarding some of the countries of residence are not available.

Source: UNHCR forthcoming.



concern. Women may also collect fuel or water for sale to others. There are many situations when local authorities—whether legal or de facto rulers—inhibit women’s mobility and activities, or deny access to international organizations providing relief. In 1998, for example, the National Movement for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) launched a campaign of violence specifically intended to provoke civilian displacement from the countryside into the main cities; having herded over a million villagers into the cities of Huambo, Kuito and Malange, UNITA then cut off their access to food.⁷⁵ The war in Angola lasted for 27 years, ending only with the death of UNITA’s leader, Jonas Savimbi in February 2002; the long narrative of warfare was studded with episodes of famine, civil distress and displacement, and women were driven to their limit in trying to provide for their families.

During the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan from 1979 to 1989, insurgency and counter-insurgency in the countryside ruined the rural economy, and—aided by the inducement of politically motivated humanitarian aid—led to the flight of millions of citizens to camps across the Pakistan border and in Iran. Between 1979 and 1992, an estimated six million people—more than one-fifth of the population, fled their places of origin to become refugees or internally displaced in Afghan towns and cities. The transformations within society, and of the rural economy, had contradictory repercussions on women’s roles, on gender relations, and on the assertion of patriarchal controls. As in other turbulent settings, communities sending out male combatants burdened women with new types of responsibilities in the day-to-day management of their households.⁷⁶

The absence of men, who are away taking part in fighting, loads on to women temporary headship of the family, and the burden of ensuring food provision whether it is possible to farm, travel, find any kind of paid work, or not. There is a shift of economic and social responsibilities within households and communities from men to women, despite the many different contexts in which conflicts occur. In rural areas they become responsible for agriculture and livestock; in towns, they are more likely to resort to self-employment or casual wage labour. Even when overt warfare is over, and the situation has become merely tense and unsettled with sporadic violence, as in southern Somalia, men’s

will or capacity to provide for the household may have disintegrated: “Now we obey our women. Women sell tomatoes, maize, etc., and men are supported by their wives. They are taking us through this difficult time.... That is how we are living,” was how an elder from the beleaguered coastal town of Brava described life to a researcher in a study conducted by the Agency for Cooperation and Research in Development (ACORD).⁷⁷

Responsibilities for family provision also extend in some situations to very young women: in postgenocide Rwanda, an estimated 45,000 households were headed by children, 90 per cent of them girls.⁷⁸ For some women, the changes into which they are forced may be embraced as a liberation from the old social order. Some find work with NGOs in relief camps, or develop their own self-help groups. The opportunity for opening up “political space” and pushing the social boundaries are frequently present in times of social crisis, and wars are no exception.⁷⁹ Many women in refugee camps, or in the diaspora created by conflict, have gained from education programmes and exposure to the wider world. They bring to the establishment of peace and “normal life” a desire for expanded educational opportunities for girls, and experiences of earning independent incomes and making other choices in life, which were previously unthinkable in the culture in which they were raised.

WOMEN AND THE SEARCH FOR PEACE

In the past decade, considerable interest has developed among researchers and organizations working for peace in the potential and actual role of women in bringing an end to conflict. The conventional view is that women find war and violence intrinsically antipathetic, and that femaleness or femininity can automatically be equated with an urge for peace. This assumption, disputed by recent feminist critique, appears oversimplistic in the light of the active role some women take in conflicts or in supporting the fighting cause. However, the view prevails that women—whether for biological or socially constructed reasons—have a stronger motivation for peace than men, and

special capacities for conflict resolution. International Alert's 1998 Code of Conduct states: "We explicitly recognize the particular and distinctive peace-making roles played by women in conflict-afflicted communities. Women and women's organizations are often reservoirs of important local capacities which can be used in peace-building activities".⁸⁰ This perception has led to a range of recent international activity to explore and promote women's peace-building initiatives.

One interpretation of the "warrior" instinct displayed by some women is that it is an attempt to reduce violence rather than increase it. Many examples exist of women courageously resisting violence, or putting themselves in the way of armed assault. Women in the Palestinian territories, for example have frequently confronted Israeli soldiers in their homes and neighbourhoods, showing equal or even superior bravery to men.⁸¹ In northern Somalia, women have staged cultural sit-ins to forestall hostilities between warring clans. Many of these spontaneous actions can be seen as attempts to reduce day-to-day carnage or protest about its effects in the midst of ongoing wars, rather than as efforts to bring warring parties to settlement. Protests such as that of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina during the crisis of the "disappeared" in the late 1970s and early 1980s may start spontaneously and then continue over many years. They contribute to the idea of the peace-making woman and her iconic role in re-establishing a social order with moral and compassionate values at its core.

Undertaking action in the midst of war

Many activities undertaken by women at the peak of fighting are measures to provide relief assistance in their neighbourhoods or communities. In these contexts, women may act within a church or faith group, or as members of some existing voluntary organization for women. While they may confront acute political and military difficulties, having to cross fighting lines, face down militia leaders trying to co-opt their supplies, and be as strategic in their operating tactics as any commando unit,

these efforts are usually labelled "charitable", "humanitarian" or "social", and their political significance is ignored.⁸²

The lack of acknowledgement of their significance does not extend to those whose interests these programmes cross. Rajani Tirangana of Sri Lanka, a poet and writer who wrote powerfully against the violence of conflict, was one of a group of women who set up the Poorani Women's Centre in Jaffna, the Tamil stronghold. Poorani provided shelter to victims of the war, including victims of rape and their children. In 1989, Rajani was killed because her activities threatened perpetrators of the conflict.⁸³ Political engagement and risk is a precondition of all such activities. In Mogadishu, Somalia, between 1991 and 1993, when indiscriminate fighting led to famine in many parts of the country, women activists were similarly threatened. They risked their lives to run food kitchens under targeted attack from gunmen. By moving food about in small quantities to nearly 1,000 locations, and cooking it immediately, thus devaluing it as a commodity, they thwarted warlords trying to steal their supplies. This programme saved over one million lives, but the safety of its co-ordinator became so jeopardized that she was forced into exile.⁸⁴

Other women's groups have come together to assist those suffering from assault, rape or bereavement, opening up hot-lines, and refuges or centers where women can jointly address common problems. A large number of such organizations sprang up in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia in the early 1990s, especially in response to the widespread problem of sexual assault, and have subsequently remained in existence, protecting women victims and actively opposing war, violence and nationalist extremism.⁸⁵ The dividing line between relief and protesting war or militarism can be extremely thin. In Russia, the Mothers of Soldiers organization has demonstrated in the streets, lobbied among officials of state institutions and employed other peaceful means to recover youths from the Russian army before they are socialized into a culture of violence.⁸⁶ Among the NGOs formed by urban and educated Afghani women in exile was the controversial Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA), founded in 1977. RAWA engaged in political campaigning and advocacy, alongside humanitarian assistance for women and children.⁸⁷

The creation by women of grassroots NGOs whose work straddles humanitarian, social and educational activities in the midst of armed struggle, alongside the promotion of peace, has an important role in establishing women as civil-society actors, with implications for women's later claims for enhanced participation in the postconflict society. When war-affected women in Afghanistan, the former Yugoslavia, Somalia, Colombia, Sri Lanka or elsewhere have joined with others similarly affected and taken on such roles, they have developed strength and an unexpected capacity for setting goals and undertaking action to reach them, without male guidance or control.

Women's informal peace initiatives

From community-based action on behalf of the war-affected, to participation in action to end war itself, only a small conceptual step is required. A recent study of individual and collective initiatives for peace in Sri Lanka shows how, since the early 1970s, women have repudiated the ethnic divide over which the civil war was fought, and worked hard to create the conditions for peaceful democracy and support for human rights.⁸⁸ Many examples exist of women's efforts, in societies that have long been in a state of tension overlapping into war, to build ideas of peaceful co-existence across religious and cultural divides, and take positive actions to support this purpose. Such community-based movements exist in Palestine, Indonesia, former Yugoslavia, Mozambique, Israel and other settings. The importance of these initiatives has been acknowledged in a number of UN reports, which have also underlined the contribution women make to peace as educators within their families and societies.⁸⁹

Women's peace activism may encounter fewer difficulties in expressing concerns about conflict than do men. This is not to decry the courage that is required, or the strategic and political understanding: such acts as peace rallies, or non-violent obstructionism, are far from disingenuous. A women's march in Sierra Leone in May 2000 set the stage for a march of parliamentarians and civil-society organizations a few days later.

Without the women's demonstration that peaceful action against the conflict was possible, the second march would probably have incited a violent reaction.⁹⁰

Another little-known example is the Naga Mothers' Association (NMA) in one of India's northeastern states, home to a long-running insurgency. Set up in 1984, the initial focus of the NMA was on development work. Gradually, the group intervened in the conflict. Adopting a two-pronged strategy, NMA members walked miles into Myanmar, where the leaders of one of their factions were located, and attempted to persuade them to initiate dialogues for peace. They then began a campaign called "Shed no more blood" in which they appealed as mothers—both of fighters and martyrs—to the Indian security forces and the militants to end rivalry and bloodshed, both among the militant factions and with the army.⁹¹ The women have subsequently maintained pressure for peace and for negotiations among the Naga factions to create the environment for a settlement.

The visibility of women in such initiatives has recently become more prominent. One example is that of the Women in Black (WIB) international network, with chapters in over 12 countries. The Serbian group was credited with a role in the overthrow of the regime of President Slobodan Milosevic. Members of Women in Black demonstrated outside government offices for years, calling for peace and denouncing the government's military adventures. Stones were thrown at the women, they were beaten up and arrested, and every effort was made by the regime to isolate the group and alienate its support. As members of an international network, their strategy was to build networks of solidarity "combining feminism and anti-militarism".⁹²

Colombia has recently seen the establishment of a National Movement of Women against the War. The independent experts collecting evidence on women's participation in war for UNIFEM describe taking part in a peace march of 20,000 women in Medellin, in which the principal slogan was: "We won't give birth to more sons to send to war". Examples of cross-border initiatives by women searching for peace include the Mano River Union Women's Network for Peace, which contains members from Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. The network claims to

have been instrumental in resolving the conflict in Sierra Leone, and in helping start negotiations between the Mano River countries; its own origins lie in the membership of one of its key activists in the national Women’s Forum in Sierra Leone before the war began there in 1991. The Women’s Forum already had a voice and powerful contacts at the national level, and was able to reach out regionally and internationally.

Women and formal peace negotiations

The processes surrounding the search for peace vary according to the circumstances of war, and these circumstances are more or less propitious for women’s involvement. Some wars are relatively short, and consist of a military campaign which ends in the victory of one side over the other (for example, Tanzania’s 1979 invasion of Uganda); in such a case, the victor usually dictates the terms of peace. In other cases, a long-term or short-term insurgency or multiple insurgencies within a country can lead to external intervention of some kind, and the parties may be brought to the table under the pressure of larger national powers or the international community (for example, Cambodia 1967–91, Kosovo 1999 and Somalia 1991–2004). The creation of a new state by a national or ethnic subgroup seeking independence is a further variation (for example, Bangladesh in 1971 and Eritrea in 2000), and here the settlement involves the establishment of a whole new set of government institutions. In yet another kind of situation, a long period of armed resistance has aided a country’s “liberation” from repressive or colonial regimes (for example Viet Nam, Nicaragua, Namibia and South Africa); the establishment of a new government similarly involves a transition or transformation of structures.⁹³

Where women have taken part in a liberation struggle as fighters or active supporters, it may be easier for women to demand places at the settlement table.⁹⁴ The creation of a new state or the emergence of a new liberal and democratic state, as in South Africa and Namibia, also offers opportunities for women’s organizations previously active in the struggle to

demand a role in negotiations for new constitutional provisions and governmental structures. Women are often aware that if they do not manage to gain a place in negotiations and help to shape the new governance framework, the upheaval of war, the trials, tribulations, losses and distress endured in the name of fighting for a “better society” may leave them in the same disadvantaged positions as before the war took place, or even worse off (see next chapter).

Thus women’s desire to sit at the peace table is motivated by many considerations, among which is the determination to create better livelihood circumstances and not simply contemplate the carve-up of power over government offices, patronage and budgetary resources. Women are often anxious that socio-economic predicaments arising out of war should be addressed (see box 13.4). Some feminist critiques of standard peace processes have pointed out that unless the underlying causes of conflict, including gross poverty and inequity, are addressed in the course of their attempted resolution, peace will be neither long-lasting nor “gendered”.⁹⁵ In this perspective, efforts to secure peace settlements or resolve conflicts definitively cannot afford to regard gender considerations as peripheral to the peace-seeking quest—as tends still to be the case. Where an “ungendered” peace is secured, it may be a peace in which the widespread violent conflict associated with war has ended; but it is likely to be a peace in which social violence (against women), structured violence (against minorities or other seriously discriminated groups), and gross violations of human rights continue to occur.

At the peace table

Significant attention at the international level has recently been given to the difficulties women face in gaining actual places at the negotiating table. On the exclusion of women from the post-Oslo peace discussions between Israel and Palestinians, a female commentator wrote:

“How ironic it was that high-ranking Israeli generals, who spent a good proportion of their lives waging war, have now become the ultimate voices of authority of peace, while the perspectives and experience of women peace activists have been rendered trivial”.⁹⁷

Box 13.4 The end of conflict in Cambodia

Women account for nearly two-thirds of the population of Cambodia and head a third of all households. With the breaking up of old social structures and relationships as a result of the long years of war, genocide and upheaval, the old pattern of mutual assistance and community interaction that once characterized Cambodian society gave way to individualized, monetized relations.

More women and children have been pushed into the “rest and recreation” industry, and increasing burdens have been imposed on returnees (an estimated 370,000 refugees), among whom are many women, especially widows. A 1995 survey of the reintegration of this population showed that up to 40 per cent were not managing economically.

The pressure on agricultural land, especially where it is mined, affects livelihoods in a society that remains primarily agricultural, in particular those women running households on their own. The UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) noted that at the village level, many disputes arose over ownership of land. The breakdown of traditional systems of conflict resolution also meant that with the return of peace, women and children found themselves at the receiving end of heightened levels of violence.⁹⁶

In such circumstances, a peace settlement that fails to address the predicaments affecting women will fail to address the underlying circumstances which foment insecurity and violent upheaval.

Source: Curtis 1998.

There were no women at the Dayton peace talks that ended the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina; the examples are too many to name. Whatever the credibility of women in grassroots organizations and traditional community and caring roles, they are marginalized from negotiations at the peace table. Their relative lack of education and experience at senior levels in public life compound their difficulties in seeking a voice.

However, a number of international organizations now try to provide women with fora in which they can develop positions which can be placed before peace negotiation delegations. In the case of the Somali conflict, the ongoing negotiations between the warring clans which have been attempted in different venues over the past 10 years have admitted a women's representative delegation, even if its role has been restricted to observer status. Women were credited by former US Senator George Mitchell for having made an important contribution to the Northern Ireland peace negotiations. “The two women who made it to the table had a tough time at first. They were treated quite rudely by some of the male politicians... Through their own perseverance and talent, by the end of the process they were valued contributors.”⁹⁸

Postwar transitional arrangements and interim administrations, such as those in Afghanistan and Iraq, have made significant gestures in the direction of female inclusion. The Bonn Agreement of 2001 ending the Afghan war offered a clear commitment to mainstreaming gender and redressing past injustice; and after discussions in Kabul in 2002, a Ministry of Women's Affairs and a Gender Advisory Group were established. A number of international organizations have offered training to women so that they have the leadership and negotiating skills to participate effectively in peace-keeping activities and interim governmental institutions. All such efforts help to avoid a situation in which women and the issues that are of most importance to them do not become relegated to the sidelines once peace has begun to prevail. However, it is also the case that effective modalities for women's inclusion where social cleavages in the society have been acute and there can be no one “women's voice”, are still in their infancy.

There has been a similar recognition by some international peace-keeping operations that gender issues should receive attention. The “peace-keeping environment” is not necessarily

one that favours women, who face continued, sometimes enhanced, levels of violence in the postconflict situation, and are lured by need into flourishing “rest and recreational” industries, including prostitution and trafficking. In East Timor, the UN Secretary-General’s Representative was originally opposed to the creation of a gender affairs unit in the UN Transitional Authority, but later agreed he had been mistaken. The first regulation passed by the Transitional Authority guaranteed human rights standards, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), as a foundation of all new government institutions. Women thereafter participated in negotiations surrounding the establishment of new institutions of democratic governance. The gender affairs unit worked with women throughout East Timor to make the acceptance of a human rights regime into a reality. As a result, the subsequent elections for the Constituent Assembly produced a relatively high number of women representatives.⁹⁹

The international climate

In recent years international and donor organizations have given increasing recognition to the impact of conflict on women, and to the necessity of taking account of women’s specific needs in the transition to peace. Two programmes—the International Fellowship for Reconciliation’s Women and Peacemaking Programme launched in 1998, and International Alert’s Gender Campaign launched in 1999—have been established specifically to promote women’s contribution to peace. The US Agency for International Development (USAID) has carried out a two-year investigation of gender issues in postconflict societies (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, El Salvador, Georgia, Guatemala and Rwanda).¹⁰⁰ The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has held internal seminars on “Gender and post-conflict reconstruction” in which it has looked at how women’s voices can be integrated in peace negotiations, and in the allocation of resources and monitoring of human security in postconflict situations.

Thus it is fair to say that, since the Beijing Conference, the international climate has become more open to engaging with women and addressing their specific predicaments in conflict situations, as well as consulting them during the transitional phase leading out of conflict towards peace. Considerable progress can similarly be seen to have been made in the development of international humanitarian law. Much has been done to correct the historic impunity enjoyed by perpetrators of sexual violence against women during war, and to recognize women’s and girls’ special needs for protection during conflict, and in areas in transition from states of war to states of peace. These developments were stimulated by the international publicity given to mass rapes in Bosnia and to the experiences undergone by women during the Rwandan genocide, tragedies regarded as having had a catalytic effect on advancing international gender justice.¹⁰¹ But the new respect accorded to women in landmark provisions of international law was also a response to prolonged efforts of women activists to attain legitimacy for their cause.

The first milestone came in January 1992, when CEDAW adopted Recommendation 19 to add to its existing provisions, declaring violence against women a form of discrimination. In 1993 the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna stressed women’s rights as “an inalienable and indivisible part of human rights” in its Declaration and Programme of Action, and called for an end to all forms of violence against women. Shortly thereafter the UN General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (DEVAW) and in 1994 came the appointment of a Special Rapporteur on violence against women by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). These developments were precursors to the emphasis given in the Beijing Platform for Action to the need to curtail violence against women, especially during war, and obtain enforcement of human rights instruments and redress against perpetrators of violations. The passage by the UN Security Council of Resolution 1325 in 2000, urging member states to ensure increased representation of women in decision-making mechanisms for the resolution of conflict, is the high-water mark of many post-Beijing advances. These are examined in chapter 14.

The application of international instruments to resolve problems of gender injustice experienced on the ground can never prove an adequate corrective in situations where gender inequality is a prevailing norm. This is not to suggest that changes to international law are not worth pursuing: on the contrary, they help to legitimize new normative frameworks, and can be used in advocating legal and social change. However, their limitations are real. The call to uphold international human rights for women and all those facing gross violations is at its least efficacious in situations of conflict, where the rule of law has broken down and insecurity is at its worst. But once peace building begins to take serious hold, the fact that there has been a recognition of the need for women's voices to be heard in creating a real and effective peace ought to yield further dividends in years to come. Nothing, however, can be taken for granted while armed conflicts and the "war on terror" remain pervasive in so many parts of the world.

Notes

- 1 SIPRI 2004:summary of chapter three.
- 2 Kandiyoti 2004:2, quoting Donini et al. 2004.
- 3 Nordstrom 1992:271, cited in Turshen and Twagiramariya 1998.
- 4 Afshar 2003:149.
- 5 Murray et al. 2002:346.
- 6 Turshen and Twagiramariya 1998; Kaldor 1999.
- 7 Butalia 2004.
- 8 Afshar 2003:178–9.
- 9 Small Arms Survey 2004.
- 10 Small Arms Survey 2004.
- 11 Jadwa 2003.
- 12 UN Secretary General 2002: 26.
- 13 Kaldor 1999.
- 14 Mamdani 2001.
- 15 Gardner and El Bushra 2004:162.
- 16 Rehn and Sirleaf 2002:10.
- 17 Rehn and Sirleaf 2002:11.
- 18 Murray et al. 2002:346, using WHO data.
- 19 Mkandawire 2002.
- 20 Amnesty International 2004:14.
- 21 Murray et al. 2002.
- 22 Legros and Brown 2001.
- 23 Rehn and Sirleaf 2002:33.
- 24 Sørensen 1998:38.
- 25 UN Secretary General 2002:23.
- 26 Butalia 2002.
- 27 Rajasingham-Senanayake 2001:122.
- 28 Amnesty International 2004:1.
- 29 Butalia 2004.
- 30 Krug et al. 2002:156.
- 31 Pankhurst 2003:159.
- 32 Gardner and El Bushra 2004:70.
- 33 Krug et al. 2002:156.
- 34 IWRC 2003; Harding 2004.
- 35 Physicians for Human Rights 2002:44–51.
- 36 Ward 2002.
- 37 Kandiyoti 2004.
- 38 UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre 2001.

- 39 World Vision International 1996:14.
- 40 Minority Rights Group International 1997:26.
- 41 United Nations 2000b:158.
- 42 Amnesty International 1997.
- 43 UNAIDS 1998, quoted in Rehn and Sirleaf 2002:53.
- 44 Rehn and Sirleaf 2002:50.
- 45 Rehn and Sirleaf 2002:52.
- 46 UNRISD 1993:24.
- 47 Coomaraswamy 1998.
- 48 Williams and Masika 2002, quoted in Rehn and Sirleaf 2002:12.
- 49 IOM 2001, quoted in Rehn and Sirleaf 2002:12.
- 50 IOM 2001, quoted in Rehn and Sirleaf 2002:12.
- 51 Afshar 2003:179.
- 52 McKay and Mazurana 2004.
- 53 Luciak 2004.
- 54 Luciak 2004; Ertürk 2004.
- 55 Gautam et al. 2001.
- 56 Amnesty International 2004:24.
- 57 Quoted in Sørensen 1998:33.
- 58 UNIFEM 2004a:25.
- 59 OAU 2000:176.
- 60 Krug et al. 2002.
- 61 Sørensen 1998:33.
- 62 Rehn and Sirleaf 2002.
- 63 Cited in Bennett et al. 1995:14.
- 64 UNHCR quoted in United Nations 2000b:162.
- 65 UNHCR 2004.
- 66 Kaldor 1999.
- 67 Weiner 1996, cited in Kaldor 1999.
- 68 UNHCR 2004.
- 69 Watson 1996:49.
- 70 Kandiyoti 2004; Gardner and El Bushra 2004.
- 71 El Bushra 2003:259; Holt 2003:229.
- 72 Gardner and El Bushra 2004:70.
- 73 Centers for Disease Control 1992:16.
- 74 *Lancet* 1995, quoted in Rehn and Sirleaf 2002:35.
- 75 Save the Children 2000:45.
- 76 Kandiyoti 2004:9–10.
- 77 Quoted in El Bushra 2004.
- 78 UN Secretary-General 2000, para 35.
- 79 Pankhurst 2003:159.
- 80 International Alert 1998:6, quoted in Pankhurst 2003.
- 81 Afshar 2003:181.
- 82 Sørensen 1998:6.
- 83 Samuel 2004.
- 84 Gardner and El Bushra 2004:179.
- 85 Center for Women War Victims 2003.
- 86 Sørensen 1998:7.
- 87 Kandiyoti 2004:10.
- 88 Samuel 2004.
- 89 Rehn and Sirleaf 2002.
- 90 Rehn and Sirleaf 2002.
- 91 Banerjee 2001.
- 92 Rehn and Sirleaf 2002; Women in Black 2004.
- 93 UNRISD 1993.
- 94 Corrin 2003; UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs 2003, 2004.
- 95 Pankhurst 2003:156–7.
- 96 Curtis 1998.
- 97 Sharoni 1995, quoted in Sørensen 1998.
- 98 Rehn and Sirleaf 2002:79.
- 99 Rehn and Sirleaf 2002:61.
- 100 USAID Office of Women in Development 2000.
- 101 Walsh 2004.