Bibliographic Details

The International Studies Encyclopedia

Edited by: Robert A. Denemark
eISBN: 9781444336597
Print publication date: 2010

Update: 2010-02-15 Revision History ↓

Conflict Resolution: Feminist Perspectives

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Comment on this article

Introduction

Although the term "conflict resolution" has been in use for quite some time, only in the past two decades has it been institutionalized as a distinct field of study in the academy and as a body of knowledge and applied skills that can be utilized in many spheres of our personal, social, and political lives. Because the academic study of conflict resolution emerged as a critique of mainstream International Relations (IR), feminist theory and conflict resolution have much in common. First and foremost, they share a critique of traditional power politics grounded in realist or neorealists analyses of conflict. Further, feminists and conflict resolution scholars share the core belief that war is not inevitable and that human beings have the capacity to resolve conflicts nonviolently. Yet, despite the striking similarities between conflict resolution theory and feminist theory, feminist perspectives and feminist scholars and practitioners remain marginalized within the field of conflict resolution, much like their counterparts in other fields of inquiry.

Feminist interventions in conflict resolution have been similar in many ways to feminist critiques in other disciplines and fields of inquiry, but they have gained more currency in the past two decades, with the expansion of feminist scholarship in IR. Feminist perspectives on conflict resolution ranged in tone and political goals and, like other political interventions, they can be organized along a continuum, from liberal calls for inclusion and visibility within the emerging field of study and practice to more radical interventions which have called into question the underlying assumptions and mainstream theories in the field. The latter interventions did not call for reforms within the field but rather demanded its radical transformation. As part of the effort to transform conflict resolution, a new generation of feminist conflict resolution scholars has engaged in original theorizing and

groundbreaking research, including in conflict-torn regions. The original scholarship published as a result of these studies, which will be discussed later in this essay, underscores the centrality of gender to conflict resolution theory, research and practice. The body of original feminist research in conflict resolution highlights issues and dimensions of conflicts that have remained unexamined in conventional, nonfeminist, conflict resolution scholarship.

Feminist scholarship in conflict resolution has included at least one element, though often some combination of several, from the following list:

> 1 Critiques of the absence and/or marginalization of women in the field and an effort to include women and to make women visible and heard.
>
> 2 Articulation of a unique feminist standpoint for approaching peacemaking and conflict resolution, which is essentially different to, and qualitatively better than, mainstream (or male-stream) perspectives.
>
> 3 Feminist theorization of difference in CR theory and practice (challenges to essentialism, intersections, power and privilege, culture).
>
> 4 Feminist redefinition of central concepts in the field, especially violence, power, peace, and security.
>
> 5 Original feminist research and theorizing, including field research in conflict areas, designed to transform, not merely reform, the field.

In this essay, I focus primarily on feminist perspectives pertaining to the analysis and resolution of conflicts, which have been traditionally described in IR literature as "international conflicts" and/or "ethnic conflicts." Feminists, like other critical scholars, have called the terms themselves into question and suggested alternatives. In addition to critically examining various feminist critiques of conflict resolution theory, research, and practice, this essay highlights original and noteworthy contributions that feminist scholars and practitioners have made to conflict resolution study and practice. Finally, I discuss some new directions for feminist work in this area and examine the prospects and challenges for a fruitful collaboration between scholars of conflict resolution and feminist scholars.

Challenging Exclusion and Marginalization: Struggles for Inclusion, Voice, and Visibility

Early interventions centered around the question "where are the women?" in conflict resolution theories, research, and such practices as mediation and negotiation. Feminist scholars challenged the absence, exclusion, and marginalization of women's experiences, voices, and perspectives both at the negotiation tables and in textbooks (Rifkin 1984; Kolb and Coolidge 1991; Stamato 1992; Sharoni, 1993; Taylor and Miller 1994; Kolb 2000; Anderlini 2007; English 2009). They questioned why, despite the fact that 51 percent of the world's population is female and that women across the globe have been at the forefront of peace and justice struggles since at least the turn of the century, women continue to be marginalized, if not excluded, from official policymaking circles or at best are confined to the margins of political debates concerning peace and security. They further suggested that paying attention to women's experiences would greatly contribute to both the analysis and the resolution of conflicts (Sharoni 1993; 1995; Cockburn 1998; 2007; Byrne 2009). Many feminists insisted that because women and girls constitute at least half of the world population, their experience should be counted and carefully considered alongside the experience of men (Taylor and Miller 1994; D'Amico and Beckman 1995; Turpin and Lorentzen 1996). Others, on the other hand, argued that because women are different to men, mostly due to a gendered socialization and experiences in conflict, they may be uniquely positioned to offer creative approaches to conflict resolution and peacemaking (Eisler 1989; Boulding 1992, 1995; Reardon 1993; Fearon 1999; Fearon and McWilliams 2000).

In the academy, the struggle was led primarily by graduate students with feminist consciousness who drew attention to the exclusion of women's voices and perspectives from course syllabi and major texts. They also pointed out the absence of women faculty, especially in programs that focused on international conflict resolution and offered graduate degrees in the field (Sharoni 1993; Stephens 1994; English 2009). These interventions called for the inclusion of work *by* women and *on* women in the emerging conflict resolution canon, and for the hiring of women faculty, whose teaching responsibility would include developing new courses that focused on gender and conflict. Around the same time, women and feminist practitioners in the growing field of mediation and alternative dispute resolution (ADR) began to call into question the assumption that mediation and negotiation were gender-neutral processes. They highlighted differences in women's and men's experiences of the conflict as well as in

processes of mediation and negotiation and their outcomes (Hill 1990; Chataway and Kolb 1994; Dewhurst and Wall 1994; Watson 2004). The critiques were similar to feminist critiques in other fields. Feminists called into question the dominant discourses of mediation and negotiation for the masculinist assumptions and expectations. Grounded primarily in rational–choice theories, negotiators were expected to be rational, competitive, utility–maximizing individuals, while mediators were proffered to be neutral and objective. Feminists argued that these expectations valorize behaviors that are associated with men and therefore perpetuate their dominance in the field. Instead, they introduced alternative perspectives on conflict, mediation, and negotiation, focusing primarily on power dynamics and social aspects of relationships (Kolb and Coolidge 1991; Kolb 1992; Taylor and Miller 1994; Kolb and Putnam 1995; Ely and Meyerson 2000; Putnam and Kolb 2000).

In the area of policy making, feminist perspectives on conflict and conflict resolution challenged the absence of women at all decisionmaking levels and especially at the negotiation tables (Cravers 1990; Kolb and Coolidge 1991; Watson 1994; Mazur 2002). More recently, researchers using datasets examined the impact of gender inequalities on intrastate conflict. They concluded that states characterized by gender inequality are more likely to experience intrastate conflict (Caprioli 2000, 2005; Caprioli and Boyer 2001). Along with the expansion of this body of literature, debates about gender inclusiveness and its implications for conflict and peacemaking have become commonplace in advocacy circles, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and International Nongovernmental Organizations (INGOs) around the world. Women within these organizations have worked tirelessly to transform policies and practices in the direction of gender–mainstreaming. UN Security Council Resolution 1325 is viewed as a serious milestone in the laborious process of infusing gender awareness and sensitivity into peacemaking and peacekeeping (Anderlini 2004; Anderlini and El–Bushra 2004; Cohn et al. 2004).

A Different Standpoint or Essentialist Theorizing?

While many feminists continue to focus on documenting women's contributions to conflict resolution and peacemaking and advancing "gender mainstreaming" within international organizations that intervene in conflicts, others have warned against the tendency to "add women and stir," which may not have a significant impact on the analysis or the resolution of conflicts (Zalewski 1995; Daly 2005; Squires 2005; Squires and Weldes 2007). At the same time, feminists inspired by women peace activists around the world have insisted that women have a different perspective on questions of war and peace and therefore can make unique contributions to peacemaking and to conflict resolution initiatives (Boulding 1992; Reardon 1993). Although feminists enthusiastically embraced the project of highlighting women's activism around the world, the claim that women's agency stems from their sex categorization was not unanimously endorsed by feminists.

Indeed, there has been an ongoing debate among feminists, as in scholarly and policymaking circles and the general population, on whether the mere call for equal participation of women in political affairs would guarantee a more peaceful agenda. The fact that throughout history more women than men have organized against war and in search of nonviolent ways to resolve conflicts has been used by some feminists as to establish the case for women's special relationship to peace and for a unique feminist standpoint on peacemaking and conflict resolution (Cambridge Women's Peace Collective 1984; Eisler 1989; Boulding 1992; Alonso 1993).

Those who wish to maintain the status quo of male–dominated politics have often used as examples of such hawkish, nationalist, and warmongering female leaders as Golda Meir, Indira Gandhi, Margaret Thatcher, Madeline Albright, and Condeleeza Rice (Fukuyama 1998). However, most feminists working on these issues nowadays insist that it is not one's biological sex, but rather one's overall political perspective and vision and the gendered systems that shape them, that affect one's inclination for war or peace (Hunter and Flamenbaum 1993; Zalewski 1995; Tickner 1997; Caprioli 2000; Peterson and Runyan, forthcoming).

This debate has triggered many conversations among feminist scholars and activists, inspiring more complex theorizing that takes into account women's experiences as both victims and perpetrators of conflict and makes clear that the call for the inclusion of women at the negotiation table is first and foremost a call for the inclusion of *different* perspectives. Toward this end, some feminists sought to demonstrate that women do have a special relationship to peace and to explain why and how it differs from conventional male perspectives.

During the latter part of the nineteenth century, primarily in Europe and North America, women activists and feminist scholars began to explore and articulate the connections between their struggles for emancipation as women and their pursuit of justice and peace. A prime example of this perspective was Virginia Woolf's 1938 treatise *Three Guineas*, which was written in the form of a letter in response to a man's question on how to prevent war. Woolf suggested that the issue of "how to prevent war" was

linked to the broad complex of social relations and gender inequalities that prevailed in society at that time. She challenged the separation between the private and public domains which, she argued, has maintained women's exclusion from public and political roles. Her prescription was to bring the private world of women into the public world of men to transform both (Woolf 1938).

Since the mid-1970s, much feminist work has sought to explain women's predisposition to peacemaking and the non-violent resolution of conflicts. Some argued that because women experience sexism and violence they can empathize with other victims and support movements for justice and peace (Brownmiller 1975; Enloe 1987). Others insisted that it was women's experiences as nurturers, and especially the practice of mothering, that provides the basis for a unique feminist standpoint on peacemaking and conflict resolution (Noddings 1984; Brock-Utne 1985; Reardon 1985; Ruddick 1989). Sara Ruddick's work on "maternal thinking" is exemplary of feminist theorists who claim that there is an "authentic" universal experience of mothering, which when released from patriarchal control can challenge militarization and nurture peaceful relationships (Ruddick 1989). The contention that women have unique peacemaking qualities and skills has later come under attack for reinforcing cultural practices and social expectations, which tend to equate men and masculinity with war and patriarchy.

A major work at this time was Betty Reardon's influential book *Sexism and the War System* (1985), which challenged the dominant view at the time within the field of peace studies that "women's issues" (usually narrowly defined by men) are secondary or collateral to the central concerns with questions of peace and war. Reardon equated war with patriarchy, militarism with sexism, and peace and world order with feminism (Reardon 1985). She appealed to peace movements and to peace researchers to place women's experiences and feminist analyses at the center of their work and to utilize education as a means to produce the visions and capacities for social transformation. Along these lines, empirically supported research in the fields of negotiation and mediation suggested significant differences in conflict resolution styles between women and men (Rifkin 1984; Maxwell 1992). Drawing mostly on Carol Gilligan's work, the skills required for successful mediation and negotiation were initially viewed as more compatible with women's values and dispositions (Gilligan 1982). Nevertheless, most feminist research and writing about mediation, especially family law mediation, have strongly criticized mediation as a process, insisting that it often puts women at a disadvantage (Woods 1985; Shaffer 1988; Girdner 1989; Ellis 1990; Hill 1990).

This period saw the emergence of scholars who referred to themselves as "feminist peace researchers." Paying close attention to the peace movement and to women's roles within it, they engaged in challenging conventional scholarship on questions of war and peace and searching for new theoretical frameworks and strategies to address these questions. This project grew out of the realization that the process of conducting corrective and compensatory research had shown that the scientific method – with its emphasis on objectivity, freedom from values, and abstract reasoning – reflected the experiences, mindset, and expectations of Western white males (Carroll 1972; Forcey 1991; Tickner 1992; Sylvester 2002). The result was new theorizing, research agendas, and methods that were qualitatively different from the research reflected in such flagship male-dominated journals as the *Journal of Peace Research* and the *Journal of Conflict Resolution*.

These feminist theories and critiques examined such topics as the linkages between the public and private domains, those between the violence of war and violence against women, and those between sexism and militarism. Although some feminists occasionally compared their experiences to those of other disenfranchised groups, for the most part the effort to articulate unique feminist perspectives on peace came at the expense of addressing differences among women, such as those based on race, class, and sexual orientation.

Feminists Theorize Difference in Conflict Resolution Theory and Practice

Feminist explorations of difference in relation to conflict and conflict resolution have centered around two central themes in contemporary feminist debates. The first is a critique of the treatment of women as a monolithic entity, which is essentially different to that of men. The second, related theme addresses differences among women.

Over the last two decades, feminist scholars have raised important theoretical and methodological questions that challenged the treatment of women and men as monolithic entities, diametrically opposed to one another. In the context of peace and conflict studies, these critiques called into question the common juxtaposition of men-warriors and women-peacemakers (Elshtain 1987; Sylvester 1987; 1989; Forcey 1991; Sharoni 1998; 2001; Skjelsbak 2001). These questions arose in the context of broader theoretical discussions, involving both a conceptual shift from a focus on "women" and "men" to a focus on "gender" as a socially constructed category and a methodological shift from empiricism and materialism to constructivism (Ackerly et al. 2006).

From a social constructivist perspective, gender is both an analytical category and a relational social process (Butler 1990; Scott 1990; Butler and Scott 1992; Ferguson 1993). Further, feminists have insisted that no categories, identities or practices associated with being women or men are natural or universal. Given this contention, any attempt to generalize differences between women and men, as collectivities, comes at the expense of differences among women and men as well as at the expense of historical specificity. Inspired by this new theoretical perspective, feminists writing about war, peace, and conflict have engaged in theorizing and original research that took into account the multiplicity of women's voices and perspectives in different contexts (Elia 1996; Connolly 1999; Mason 2005). The attention to difference allowed feminists to examine critically contradictions and conflicts not only between women and men, but also among women, and more recently among men (Sharoni 1998; 2008; Whitworth 2004). As a result, there is now a rich body of literature that addresses constructions of masculinity in conflict, peacekeeping, and peacemaking (Zalewski and Parpart 1998; Masters 2008; Parpart and Zalewski 2008; Sharoni 2008).

For example, feminists insisted that women's perspectives on war and peace, like gender identities, are socially constructed and therefore must be examined in relation to the particular historical and sociopolitical contexts that shaped them. Along these lines, feminists insisted that women's struggles for peace and contributions to conflict resolution initiatives cannot be understood apart from women's participation in and support of wars (Elshtain 1987; Sylvester 1987; Elshtain and Tobias 1990; Forcey 1991). In the context of our discussion on difference, feminists argued that attempts to separate women's involvement in war from their struggles for peace reduce the complexity of women's experiences and their diverse responses to conflict. This perspective led to extensive research on the role of women in militaries and in various support roles for militaries and militarization (Turshen and Twagiramariya 1998; D'Amico and Weinstein 1999; Enloe 2000; 2007; McKelvey 2006). Feminist research has also encompassed women in national liberation movements, including those who used armed struggle as one of their modes of resistance (Sylvester 1989; Abdulhadi 1998; Sjoberg and Gentry 2007).

Feminists insisted that paying attention to difference is important not only in order to recover silenced and marginalized voices and validate individual identities, but also as a way of exposing structured inequalities and power differentials. It was this realization of power imbalances at the mediation table that inspired feminist critiques of the mediation process, especially in the field of divorce mediation and family law (Woods 1985; Shaffer 1988; Girdner 1989; Ellis 1990; Hill 1990). Feminists insisted that understanding difference can be instrumental to examining power structures and relationships. To illustrate this point, Peterson and Runyan (2009:86) use the phrase "global gendered, racialized, and sexualized divisions of power, violence, and labor and resources." This theoretical contention was inspired by feminist theories of intersections, which emerged in the context of and in relation to social movements, especially those led by people of color, gays and lesbians, women, and working-class people.

By "intersections," feminists referred to the interconnectedness of gendered identities, structures of domination, discrimination, oppression, exploitation, and violence (Crenshaw 1991; Mohanty 2003). These theories grew out of the experiences of women who felt that their histories and struggles were not reflected in the agenda of the feminist movement in Europe and North America. They included women of color, lesbians, working-class women and women in the global south, arguing that their experiences as women need to be examined in relation to other experiences shaped by their race, culture, ethnicity, class, and sexual orientation. Women of color in the US insisted that they can only be part of a feminist movement if it incorporates the notion of difference and does not force them to choose between their struggle against sexism and their commitment to end racism (Moraga and Anzaldua 1983; hooks 1984; 1990; Collins 1992; Anzaldua and Keating 2002). Along these lines, women in the global south who were engaged, alongside men, in struggles for national liberation, called into question the simplistic distinction of men-warriors and women-peacemakers. Furthermore, because these women were involved in a dual struggle, for national liberation and for women's liberation, they began to explore and address the linkages between gender oppression and the broader political context within which it unfolds (Stephenson 1983; Jayawardena 1986; Mohanty 1991).

Feminists who theorize difference see that gender identities and gender relations are socially constituted through complex interrelated processes. As a result, the actual content of being a man or a woman and the rigidity of the categories themselves are highly variable across cultures, contexts, and time. Understanding the existing linkages between different, usually interlocking, systems of domination and oppression and between different cartographies of struggle is central to the analysis of conflicts and the exploration of prospects for their resolution. Taking difference into account and applying feminist theories of intersections to conflict resolution does not involve merely paying attention to race, gender, and class as variables in a particular case study. Rather, intersectional analysis should be used to uncover the distribution of power within systems and relationships and especially to reveal how unequal distribution of power and privilege can sow the seeds and lead to the escalation of conflict.

Feminists Redefine Central Concepts in Conflict Resolution Theory, Research, and Practice

Most, if not all, feminist literature dealing with conflict and conflict resolution begins with the premise that concepts such as violence, power, security, and peace are gendered (Cohn 1987; Tickner 1992; Enloe 1993; 2000; 2007; Sharoni 1995; Pettman 1996; Agathangelou 2004; Mazurana et al. 2005; Rai and Waylen 2008; Shepard 2008; Peterson and Runyan 2009). Feminist reformulations of violence, power, peace and security have broadened the range of political discourse by challenging the narrow definition of "women's issues" and "politics." This work has the potential to transform the theories, research, intervention methods, and public debates that frame our understanding of conflict in all sphere of social and political life.

Conflict resolution theory and practice rests heavily on such concepts as violence, power, peace, and security, and for the most part scholars and practitioners in the field have embraced the conventional conceptualizations of these central ideas. Accordingly, the definition of violence has been limited to physical violence and power has been understood mostly as "power over," characterized by competition, domination and control. Similarly, mainstream conflict resolution has accepted conventional conceptualizations of peace and security. These conceptualizations have been for the most part grounded in an understanding of political life as a matter of government institutions and policies; competition between states and parties over interests, needs, and values; and clashes of powers and ideologies. Because the meaning of security has grown out of concerns about war and peace – understood as opposites – within the international state system, the meaning of peace has been limited to simply the absence of war and the understanding of security has been limited to "national security."

Feminists continue to challenge conventional understandings of central concepts in the field for ignoring, obscuring, and marginalizing a broad range of issues, voices, and perspectives. Judging from the growing body of feminist literature on war, peace, security, and international politics more generally, feminists have been quite successful in disrupting dominant paradigms and conventional ways of theorizing conflicts and their resolution. Given the quantity and quality of the scholarship on war and peace produced by feminists in the past two decades, it is reasonable to expect that mainstream scholars will join their progressive counterparts and critically engage this literature.

Feminists who have engaged in projects of rethinking concepts such as violence, power, peace, and security searched for alternative formulations that would resonate with the daily lives and struggles of women in different conflict zones around the world. The search for alternative formulations focused on questions such as, what roles do women play in conflicts and in the processes designed to bring about their peaceful resolution? How do they define violence, power, peace, and security? What are the particular strategies, processes, and organizational frameworks that women employ in their conflict resolution efforts and in their struggles for peace and justice? And how do women's and men's lives change, during conflict and post-conflict? In many ways, feminist reconceptualizations of violence, power, security, and peace offer a conceptual framework that can address all these questions and more.

Violence

Most conceptualizations of violence within the field of conflict resolution are informed by Johan Galtung's theorizing about violence. According to Galtung, peace researchers, scholars, and practitioners must look beyond the manifestations of direct, physical violence, which often leave marks on the body. His theory encompasses two additional types of violence: structural violence and cultural violence (Galtung 1975, 1990).

While feminists have generally found Galtung's theorizing of structural and cultural violence compatible with feminist interpretations of violence, they have been greatly disappointed that neither he nor his male counterparts have paid much attention in their work to the gendered nature of violence (Confortini 2006). Early feminist theorizing on violence addressed mainly direct, physical violence, and associated violence with men and nonviolence with women (Eisler 1989; Kirk 1989; Boulding 1992). These conceptualizations became more complex as feminists began to articulate connections between violence against women and structural and cultural forms of violence including the war system (Sharoni 1994; Agathangelou 2004; Sachs et al. 2007; Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2009). The shift in feminist thought to theorizing differences and articulating intersections resulted in more nuanced conceptualizations of violence, which greatly enrich Galtung's definitions of structural and cultural violence. The main difference, however, is that feminist conceptualizations of violence tend to be context-specific, grounded in particular struggles, and addressing systemic violations of people's rights and dignity based on gender, race, ethnicity, class, and sexual orientation, among other things. Feminist redefinitions of violence offer conflict resolution scholars and practitioners conceptual tools to look beyond the symptoms of violence and examine its root causes. In most cases, there were structured inequalities

and/or asymmetrical power relations, which tend to propel and fuel violence.

Power

Feminist reconceptualizations of power are especially relevant to the resolution of international conflict since, like many conflict resolution frameworks, they offer a critique of the paradigm of power politics that has dominated the field of international politics and diplomacy for almost a century. Feminists have taken issue with conventional conceptualizations of power grounded in violence and dominance because they overlook other such dimensions and characteristics of power as energy, capacity, and potential. This critique is often referred to as the difference between "power over" and "power to" (Hartsock 1983; Eisler 1989; Margolis 1989; Boulding 1992).

The powerful feminist slogan "the personal is political" has inspired many feminist attempts to redefine power in relation to conflict. Accordingly, issues like division of labor within the household, self-esteem, depression, or violence against women, which women tended to view as their private issues, are reframed as political issues, originating from and reflecting unequal power relations. Along these lines, power can be defined as agency, manifesting itself in examples of women's activism in conflict areas. As the conflict transforms their lives, these women feel empowered to shape its course and outcome (Sharoni 2001). More recently, feminist reconceptualizations of power have been influenced by Michel Foucault's theorizing on power. According to this formulation, power is everywhere, producing and shaping the meaning of everything we do (Shepard 2008). If everything we can see is shaped by and in turn shapes power relations, then everything we see is gendered, raced, and imbued with structured inequalities. This complex and multifaceted conceptualization of power has much to contribute to the analysis and resolution of conflicts.

Security

Feminist scholars and activists have long called into question the pervasive understanding of security as "national security." Thus they challenged the tendency to conflate security with national security, which takes for granted state power and the existing political status quo. They raised serious concerns with the overwhelming priority of states to invest funds and energies in the military and then rely upon the threat of using the army to "protect" the collective citizenry (Harris and King 1989; Ruddick 1989). Feminist case studies from around the world support the argument that states, far from being the providers of security, as is often assumed, have become a primary source of insecurity, especially for women and other underprivileged groups (Harris and King 1989; Sharoni 1993; Agathangelou 2004; Scuzarello 2008). Based on this evidence, feminists have concluded that the more preoccupied a government is with what it calls "national security," the more insecure are its vulnerable constituents (Enloe 1987; 2007; Sharoni 1994; Abdo and Lentin 2002; Sachs et al. 2007). Feminist reexaminations of dominant security discourses point out that "security" has become more an instrument of mystifying rhetoric than a concept with any analytical precision.

Furthermore, appeals to the need for security have quite often been used (by states) to justify the most blatant military campaigns and territorial expansions. The post–September 11, 2001 era has not only provided ample evidence to support this proposition but also inspired some brilliant, highly original feminist scholarship (Falcon 2006, Jiwani 2006, Russo 2006, Faludi 2007, Riley et al. 2008). Feminist reconceptualizations of security suggest a shift from thinking about security in mutually exclusive, zero-sum ways (i.e., "national security") to focusing instead on "human security" or "global security."

Nevertheless, many feminist critiques go beyond the critique of "national security" to question the very idea of "security" as a totalizing patriarchal concept that cannot accept any disorder, incoherence, or lack of control. In contrast, feminists suggest that security is always partial, elusive, and mundane (Sylvester 1989; Tickner 1992). Feminist interpretations of security do not treat it as an absolute end or as a scarce resource which needs to be possessed, but rather as a very complex and elusive process that needs to be negotiated and renegotiated as change occurs in different historical and sociopolitical circumstances (Tickner 1992). More recently, feminists have challenged other feminists and peace activists who tend to define security as an outcome that can be achieved rather than as a discourse. In these flawed formulations, the term "security" is often used interchangeably with the term "peace," and both assume the end of armed conflict (Jabri 1996; Mackay 2004; Shepard 2008). Feminist reconceptualizations of security can transcend what Laura Shepard (2008:127) refers to as the "theoretical tautology of defining conflict as the absence of security and security as the absence of conflict."

Peace

Feminists, regardless of the particular theories or struggles they are associated with, have generally accepted Galtung's

conceptualization of peace, which is grounded in the distinction between negative peace and positive peace (Galtung 1990; Confortini 2006). Indeed, early feminist theorizing on peace and conflict defined peace as more than the absence of physical violence, insisting that "real" peace must involve the absence of all forms of violence, including structural and cultural violence, and the presence of justice and equality for all (Boulding 1992; Reardon 1993). Peace is viewed as an outcome that seems rather impossible to achieve.

Drawing on examples from the ongoing conflicts and political processes in Israel, Palestine and Northern Ireland, Sharoni (2001:174) argues that "the transition from conflict to post-conflict realities is more complex and multi-faceted than a simple departure from a negative situation (i.e conflict) to a positive one (i.e. peace)." Cynthia Enloe (1987:538) suggested a more modest definition that emerges from "the conditions of women's lives," and involves "women's achievement of control over their lives." While this definition is both more subtle and more complex than conventional conceptualizations of peace, it still conceives of peace as a tangible outcome. Instead, some feminists suggest that peace does not have a fixed meaning, that it should rather be viewed as a political discourse. The definition of "peace," like that of any other term, reflects the political position of the person or group who defines it as well as the particular sociopolitical context within which it is constructed. Different definitions of peace often reveal different degrees of commitment to social and political change or compliance with the prevailing status quo of power relations, including the gendered divisions of power and labor in a particular society. This formulation urges feminists and other conflict resolution scholars not to assume but to probe whether the mere signing of a peace agreement is likely to improve women's lives and bring about gender equality.

In sum, feminists have long realized that the processes of refining and implementing feminist interpretations of central concepts in the field cannot be limited to the confines of the academy (Giles 2008). Today, there is consensus among feminists on the need to ground research on conflict and peacemaking in the diverse experiences of women in conflict zones. By rethinking peace and security from the daily lives and struggles of women around the world, feminists and other critical scholars can expand the understandings of peace and security to include questions of development; environmental degradation and ecological concerns; gender, race, and class inequalities; abuses of human rights; and attacks on cultural and ethnic identities (Agathangelou 2004; Agathangelou and Ling 2004; Philipose 2007; Lind forthcoming). Feminist reformulations of central concepts such as power, peace, and security represent an important step toward feminist theorizing in conflict resolution.

Toward Feminist Transformations of Conflict Resolution Theory, Research, and Practice

Challenging the centrality of men's experiences and theories and paying attention to women's lives, feminists insist, has the potential to shed light not only on the gendered aspects of social and political life, but also on other forms of structured inequality. That is, feminist perspectives are valuable not only because they call attention to gender differences, but also because they emerge from women's experiences and women represent one particular example of a disenfranchised and marginalized social group (Harding 1991; Ackerly et al. 2006). Feminists generally agree that we must ask not only what are the voices and perspectives that have been marginalized, silenced, or excluded from conventional conflict resolution scholarship, but also what are the assumptions, processes, and practices that have enabled and perpetuated these exclusions.

Toward this end, many feminists engaged in tireless work to integrate gender and feminist perspective into conflict resolution, while others have called for a radical transformation of the field. Some chose to conduct original field research in particular conflict areas, while others have put their efforts into transforming policy debates related to conflict resolution.

The term "transformation" has become increasingly popular in peace and conflict resolution studies. While still a somewhat amorphous term, its growing popularity points to the limitations of other such terms as "management" and "resolution." According to John Paul Lederach (1995:17), "unlike resolution and management, the idea of transformation does not suggest we simply eliminate or control conflict, but rather points descriptively toward its inherent dialectic nature." In other words, transformation, more than other concepts, takes into account the dynamic nature of social conflict and the potential changes it can trigger in individuals, groups, and structures. Moreover, Lederach and others prefer the term "transformation" over "resolution" or "management" because it is more dynamic and cannot be used to impose harmony or peace at the expanse of justice (Nader 1991). From a feminist perspective, the term "transformation" marks more than merely a linguistic departure from conventional approaches to the study and practice of conflict. It is also a concept that can be easily integrated into feminist perspectives on conflicts.

The move away from conventional toward new approaches to the analysis and resolution of conflicts, or from conflict resolution

to conflict transformation, has theoretical, methodological, practical, and political implications. Figure 1 identifies four key dimensions that are interrelated and offer a framework for analyzing contemporary feminist scholarship:

(1) a move from universal to context–specific theorizing;

(2) a move from top–down/prescriptive to bottom–up/elicitive intervention models;

(3) a move from scientific (positivist) to constructivist (postpositivist) research; and

(4) a move from politics oriented toward the status quo to politics oriented toward social change.

As Figure 1 underscores, however, although conventional and new approaches rest on different sets of theoretical assumptions which inform different intervention models and political practices, they should not be treated as diametrically opposed to one another but rather as two poles of a continuum.

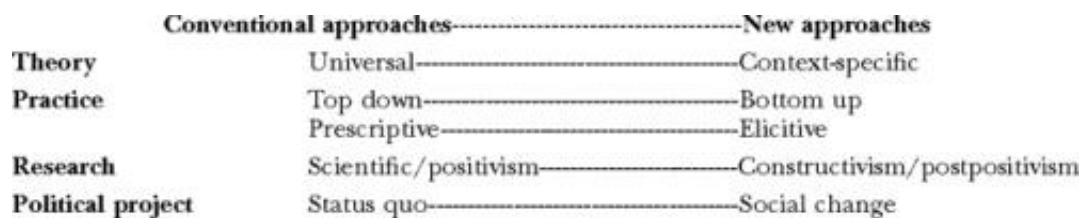|	Conventional approaches------------------------------------New approaches	
Theory	Universal------------------------------------Context-specific	
Practice	Top down------------------------------------Bottom up	
	Prescriptive------------------------------------Elicitive	
Research	Scientific/positivism------------------------Constructivism/postpositivism	
Political project	Status quo------------------------------------Social change	

Figure 1   Conventional and New Approaches to Conflict Resolution

Feminists have insisted that their interventions are not designed to discredit or delegitimize conventional approaches and practices but rather to point out to their hegemony in the field and open up space for other perspectives. Along the same lines, the proposed framework is not designed to idealize new approaches and their related practices but rather to point out potential venues for future research.

As the literature on women and gender issues in conflict zones demonstrates, feminists have long sought to ground theoretical explorations in empirical research and case studies. Theoretically, this body of literature focused primarily on women's involvement in conflict resolution efforts, peacemaking initiatives, and social justice campaigns at the grassroots level with an overemphasis on the potential of dialogue and alliances between women across political divides. Research also highlighted the impact of conflict on women's lives, with a special emphasis on critiquing militarism, nationalism, and ethnic conflict (Yuval–Davis 1997; Cockburn 1998; 2007; Fearon 1999; Cohn and Ruddick 2003; Giles et al. 2003; 2004; Jacoby 2005). A few feminist scholars, whose lives were shaped by the conflicts they study, have expanded the analysis, and have documented the multiple identities and struggles of women in conflict zones, including the treatment of feminist identities and nationalist identities as mutually exclusive, which has been a source of tension in cross–community women's alliances (Rooney 1995; Sharoni 1995; Hadjipavlou 2006; McEvoy 2009).

Feminist scholars have also worked to document women's experiences not only as victims of violent conflict but also as perpetrators, and as agents of change. This body of work included accounts of the struggles of women within national liberation movements to link their struggles for national liberation and gender equality (Aretxaga 1997; Abdulhadi 1998; Moser and Clark 2001). Feminists have also begun to pay close attention to women's roles in perpetuating violence, both within militaries and in other movements that have used armed struggle (Sjoberg 2006; Sjoberg and Gentry 2007).

The growing interest in violence against women in conflict zones, among mainstream scholars and policy makers, is noteworthy. Once a taboo in conventional analyses of conflict, the interplay between the violence of political conflict and violence against women has become part of the mainstream discourse on conflicts. Using the phrase "rape as a weapon of war," mainstream media accounts have done more to sensationalize these crimes than to address their root cause or offer ways to resolve them. Critical feminists, however, rose to the challenge and sought to contextualize and historicize these accounts. The result is a rich body of literature, addressing the interplay between gender violence and other such structured inequalities as class, race, and ethnicity, as well as various constructions of militarized masculinity (Zarkov 2001; Green 2004; Sachs et al. 2007; Koukkanen

2008; Sharoni 2008; Whitworth 2008).

Critical feminist scholarship on conflict has proliferated in the aftermath of September 11, 2009. Feminists were among the first to systematically deconstruct the dominant discourse deployed by US officials and policy makers to represent and respond to the attacks. They have called into question the pervasive manipulation of fears, threats, and insecurities as pretexts for military violence and for the expansion of US imperialism (Eisenstein 2004; 2007; Falcón 2006; Tetreault 2006; Faludi 2007; Philipose 2007; Richter–Montpetit 2007; Riley 2008; Sharoni 2008). Feminist scholars have also scrutinized myriad manifestations of heightened militarization and aggressive nationalisms in all spheres of life (Whitworth 2004; Enloe 2007; Sutton et al. 2008), the violent attacks on Muslims and people of Middle Eastern decent, as well as the changes in US immigration policies and practices (Oxford 2005; Hunt and Rygiel 2006). Above all, numerous feminists have been quick to challenge the cynical use of the narrative of rescue and the hijacking of feminism in order to legitimize, in the name of women's liberation, the US–led attacks on Afghanistan and Iraq (Abu–Lughod 2002; Russo 2006; Sjoberg 2006). As a whole, this diverse body of feminist scholarship reflects careful attention to difference, brilliant analysis of intersections, and sound grounding in particular economic, social, cultural, and political contexts.

Other promising developments in feminist perspectives on conflict involve feminist perspectives on environmental degradation and environmental conflicts (Gorney 2007; Urban 2007; Sze 2007; Detraz 2009). This literature is very important because environmental conflicts and conflict originating from globalization have become central within the conflict resolution field, even if at present little or no attention has been devoted to their gendered dimensions. Another exciting trend in feminist scholarship on conflict resolution addresses post–conflict issues including reconstruction and transitional justice (Cockburn and Zarkov 2002; Handrahan 2004; Bell and Ni Aolain 2005; Bell and O'Rouke 2007). There has also been a dramatic increase in attempts to bridge the divides between feminist academics, activists, and policy makers (Cohn et al. 2004; Giles 2008). Although projects designed to facilitate exchange and collaboration among feminists in different arenas have not been without their challenges, they have transformative potential. Whether it is a network of women in conflict zones, a gathering of women at the World Social Forum or a campaign for a UN resolution like UNSCR 3125, these initiatives offer a space, a discourse, and strategies that conventional conflict resolution scholars and practitioners will increasingly find difficult to ignore.

Conclusion

Conflict resolution as a field has rapidly expanded in the past three decades. Yet a careful examination of current trends in the field reveals a fundamental failure to come to terms with the changing nature of conflicts across societal levels. By and large, scholars and practitioners in the field continue to embrace the key assumptions, while systematically overlooking the gaps, silences, and absences embedded in these assumptions and in the field as a whole. To seriously consider these gaps, scholars, practitioners, and activists who are committed to the peaceful resolution of conflicts have to engage in critical conversations both with people whose lives have been entangled in protracted conflicts and with scholars in other disciplinary fields of study, such as development, gender, and cultural studies, which have faced similar challenges. Because feminists have much to contribute to this endeavor, it is troubling that our interventions continue to be relegated to the margins of the field, especially in the arena of international conflict resolution.

While men's recognition of the significance of feminist and women's perspectives to conflict resolution is no doubt an important step toward establishing the legitimacy of feminist theorizing in the field, it is not enough. What is needed to advance the project of feminist theorizing in conflict resolution is a critical examination of the field that will go beyond calls for the inclusion of women's voices and feminist perspectives. The field of conflict resolution is at a crucial and exciting crossroad. As people and social movements around the world engage in struggles to shape their futures, the global political context within which theories are constructed and applied is volatile and uncertain. Feminist perspectives on conflict can inspire new approaches to theory, research, practice, and activism. To engage feminism, conflict resolution scholars need to learn to embrace difference in conflict and conflict resolution. More specifically, in addition to coming to terms with the role of gender, such an approach will enable scholars and practitioners to explore questions of culture, history, disparities in power and privilege, and new understandings of identity and community which emerge in the context of struggles against different structures of inequality and oppression along the lines of, among other things, gender, ethnicity, race, class, sexuality, and nationality.

Conflict resolution as a field has yet to treat feminist theory as a central perspective that has much to offer to the analysis and resolution of conflicts. Nevertheless, feminists, publishing their work primarily in feminist magazines and working in

collaboration with colleagues in other fields, have developed an impressive body of literature that should be incorporated into the conflict resolution canon. As this impressive body of original scholarship underscores, feminists have the theoretical grounding and practical experiences and skills to radically transform the existing field of conflict resolution. However, for this to happen, the male scholars who currently dominate the center of the field would have to share their positions of power with the brilliant feminists whose work has been relegated to the margins for too long! The further expansion and institutionalization of conflict resolution studies depends on the willingness of mainstream scholars to engage seriously the contributions and critiques of feminists.

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Cite this article

Sharoni, Simona. "Conflict Resolution: Feminist Perspectives." *The International Studies Encyclopedia*. Denemark, Robert A. Blackwell Publishing, 2010. Blackwell Reference Online. 30 January 2011 <http://www.isacompendium.com/subscriber/tocnode?id=g9781444336597_chunk_g97814443365975_ss1-19>

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