9

CONTINUUMS OF VIOLENCE

Feminist peace research and gender-based violence

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Introduction

Gender-based violence is experienced personally and systemically and includes gender discrimination, domestic violence, sexual violence, conflict-related violence, and wartime rape. These continuums of violence exist in times of peace, in times of war, within families, and within state institutions. While continuums of violence vary among cultures and societies, gender-based violence is ubiquitous. How we understand violence is key to understanding how the lived experiences of people are at once, personal and political. Feminist lenses perceive gender and power dynamics in relation to violence and analyse the relationships between various types of violence, which are both spatial and temporal. As Cynthia Cockburn notes, "… gender links violence at different points on a scale reaching from the personal to the international, from the home to the back street to the manoeuvres of the tank column and the sortie of the stealth bomber: battering and marital rape, confinement, 'dowry' burnings, honour killings, and genital mutilation in peacetime; military rape, sequestration, prostitutions, and sexualised torture in war" (2004, p. 43). While all violence is gendered, we make the distinction of "gender-based violence" as violence directed at individuals based on their gender identity. In this chapter, we look specifically at gender-based violence directed towards women, acknowledging that gender-based violence is also experienced by men and boys (see Carpenter, 2006).

The continuum of violence is a constitutive relationship between different types of violence, from small acts of personal violence to large scale institutional violence (Bayard de Volo and Hall, 2015; Alden, 2010). For feminist peace scholarship, an act of violence is not a stand-alone act, but it is a manifestation of a structural inequality and gendered power relations (Braithwaite and D'Costa, 2018). The continuum of violence reflects a holistic understanding that interrogates the private and the public, the personal and the political, and blurs the distinction between war and peace.

This chapter focusses on the links between "everyday" gender-based violence and violence associated with war as part of continuums of violence. We consider gendered violence in the public and political realm as manifestations of private and personal violence, not as separate categories of violence, but as reflective of gendered social processes that form a "chain of violence". Chains of violence are not permanent structures, nor are they immune to disruption (Lawrence and Karim, 2007, p. 14); feminist interventions have unpacked the systemic

discrimination against women and sexual minorities that contribute to these chains of violence. The interconnectedness of violence is further explained through the notion of cascades of violence, where violence spreads from one space to another, one event leading to another, from powerful to powerless, and reinforces gendered relationships of domination (Braithwaite and D'Costa, 2018, p. 11). As Manjoo (2012, pp. 1–2) notes, "whether it occurs in times of conflict, post-conflict or so-called peace, the various forms and manifestations of violence against women are simultaneously causes and consequences of discrimination, inequality and oppression".

We take violence as a process rooted in social interactions and predicated on hierarchies of relations; a feminist lens highlights how these hierarchies are expressed through gendered and patriarchal systems. A narrow view of violence perceives only the effects of physical harm, but this does not capture the indirect forms of violence caused by gender-discriminatory social structures, cultural norms, and legal provisions that become normalised and embedded within societies. Lawrence and Karim (2007, p. 12) note, "as process, violence is cumulative and boundless. It always spills over. It creates and recreates new norms of collective self-understanding. Violence as process is often not recorded because it is internalised; it becomes part of the expectation of the living, whether framed as revenge or as fear, but, most important, its creation must remain transparent, its instrumentality evident beyond all attempt to reify or essentialise both its origin and its function". This process is outlined below, as we point to the insidious nature of "everyday violence" and its relationship to increasingly horrific forms of gender-based violence conceived of as "continuums of violence".

Continuums of violence

The term "continuum of violence" was coined by Liz Kelly in 1988 to describe the normalisation of daily violence leading to sexual violence. However, feminist scholars, writers, and activists had already begun to make these connections long before this articulation (Wibben, this volume). For example, in *Three Guineas* (1938), novelist and essayist Virginia Woolf argued that peace is not possible unless the structural causes of discrimination are addressed and that these are based on patriarchal oppression and domination. Elise Boulding (1984) outlined the structural relationship between patriarchy and all forms of oppression, including sexual oppression. Boulding further outlined how militarisation, male-dominated social institutions, and violence are interconnected (Boulding, 2017, p. 40). Ulrike Krause argues that "the forms of violence do not occur, isolated from each other and the different phases, but are dynamically connected through social, political, and economic factors in the surrounding context" (2015, p. 16). Likewise, Jacqui True (2012) points to the link between gendered divisions of labour in the household, the feminisation of global labour through globalisation, and gendered violence. By being curious and asking obvious questions, such as "Where are the women?", feminist peace scholars have raised questions about the political economy of violence and militarisation. They have identified various forms of violence taking place in both the public and the private sphere (see Cohn, 2012; Crenshaw, 1989; Enloe, 2000; Menon and Bhasin, 1996; Narayan, 1998).

In the following sections, we describe how different forms of gender-based violence constitute continuums of violence. In particular, we discuss two common dichotomies which obscure the process of violence in the continuums of violence: the (artificial) distinctions between private/public and wartime/peacetime. One of the main contributions of feminist peace scholars has been the unpacking of these dichotomies to reveal how chains of violence are prolonged.

Private/public

Feminist peace research blurs the line between the private/domestic realm and the public sphere, pointing to the perpetuation of gendered relations of power in both (Scott, 1988). Gendered power relations often relegate women to the private sphere and identify the public sphere as a masculine space. Feminist scholars have long rejected the separation of "public" from "private" (e.g. Elshtain, 1987; Das, 1996; Menon and Bhasin, 1996). On this view, the "personal is political" is an acknowledgement that the harms and oppressions experienced in the private sphere are translated to and reinforced by larger political structures.

Although largely associated with second-wave feminism of the 1960s and 1970s (e.g. Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, 1963), the "personal is political" was a manifestation of the American Civil Rights Movement, as Black feminists of the 20th century made the connection between the experiences of racism, class oppression, and sexism experienced on the personal level and systemic racism and sexism in political institutions and structures of power (Combahee River Collective Statement, 1977; Lorde, 1981; hooks, 1984; Crenshaw, 1989). This would come to be reflected in postcolonial feminist thought, which weaves together the threads between patriarchy, sexism, racism, colonialism, and the economic exploitation of the developing world (e.g. Lorde, 1981; Moraga and Anzaldúa, 1981; Mohanty, 1984). More recently, transnational feminism explores the global effects of globalisation and capitalism across nations, utilising the lenses of gender, class, race, and sexualities (e.g. Grewal and Kaplan, 1994; Puri, 1999; Basu, 2000; Kabeer, 2004; Moghadam, 2005; Alexander and Mohanty, 2010; Fernandes, 2013). Queering transnational feminist theories makes space for interrogating how states and nations employ "homonationalism" to reinforce exclusionary immigration policies (Puar, 2007) and reveal how states maintain and regulate heteronormative gender roles (Puri, 1999, 2016; Rao, 2020). The interrogation of Western (white) feminism is particularly important for feminist peace researchers and gives space to consider the varieties of "everyday violence" that are the consequences of paternalism and exploitation.

"Everyday violence" calls attention to the invisible forms of violence that take place in homes and in daily life (Scheper-Hughes and Philippe, 2004; Roy, 2007). Cockburn (2009, p. 159) argues "long before a man uses physical violence against a woman, she may experience 'structural violence' in a marriage in which her husband or a constraining patriarchal community holds power over her". Feminist peace scholars argue that by failing to recognise these forms of violence in the home and in everyday life, institutions responsible for creating peace reinforce and legitimise gender-discriminatory social systems (Sinha et al., 2017). They also raise questions regarding how the split between the private and the public spheres has impacted national and international law, which only recognises certain forms of violence and legitimises others (Grewal, 1999; Moore, 2003; Swaine, 2018).

The legitimisation of everyday violence often accompanies the invocation of "culture", which complicates efforts to end harmful practices or obscures the violent nature of such practices. Debates regarding the universality of human rights versus cultural relativism/absolutism, for example, habitually position "culture" or "tradition" as immutable, homogenous, uncontested, and unaffected by historical contingencies. This ignores legacies of empire, colonialism, and slavery and masks political power plays among elites (Narayan, 1997, 1998, 2000; Donnelly, 2013; pp. 110–111). Uma Narayan (2000, pp. 1084–1085) cautions feminists to avoid the "Package Picture" of cultural identity which essentialises cultures as "neatly wrapped packages, sealed off from each other". Indeed, these packages are often messy, subject to change, and reflect hierarchies of power: "dominant members of a culture often willingly

discard what were previously regarded as important cultural practices but resist and protest other cultural changes, often those pertaining to the welfare of women".

Everyday, gendered violence is experienced in a variety of discriminatory practices, particularly those that focus on women's "purity", "chasteness", or other perceived vulnerabilities. For example, menstruation taboos reflect notions of "purity" which lead to various forms of gendered violence in many cultures. Sana Ashraf (2018) argues that public discourses about love, respect, honour, and the religious rhetoric regarding purity are utilised to legitimise violence; victims of violence are seen as culprits and the perpetrators as heroes. Two examples here – the *Chhaupadi* system in western Nepal, and the practice of widowhood in South Asia – serve to illustrate how everyday, structural violence has been institutionalised and legitimised through cultural practices that mask gendered hierarchies of power.

The *Chhaupadi* system forces women to live in a cowshed or menstruation hut every month during their period and during childbirth (Karki and Khadka, 2019; Lama and Kamaraj, 2015). Menstruation taboos vary in different parts of Nepal, but the *Chhaupadi* system is still practiced in traditional Hindu families in western Nepal (Kunwar, 2013). Hundreds of women and girls have died in the period huts due to the cold, snake bites, poor diet, and other health-related problems (United Nations, 2011), leading to international and domestic outcries against the practice. Although the Supreme Court outlawed the practice in 2005 as a violation of human rights, the Nepali Parliament did not move to criminalise the practice until 2017 (Amatya et al., 2018). However, it has been difficult to stop the practice completely, as the adverse social consequences of not observing the ritual are very real.

Although we have cited an example from Nepal, many such discriminatory practices against menstruating women could be found around the world. In some parts of India, *Gaokor* is practiced. *Gaokor* is an isolated place outside the village where women are forced to live for five days during their menstruation. Menstruating women have to sleep on the floor without a proper bed, use temporary toilets, and rely on their family for food, as they are not allowed to cook during their periods. These traditional practices not only have social consequences but greatly impact the lives of the women, especially their education and health. A study carried out by Khanna et al. (2005) suggests a strong correlation between traditional menstrual practices and reproductive morbidity among adolescent girls in Rajasthan, India. Millions of girls miss their school during their periods; menstruation has also become one of the reasons for school dropout among adolescent girls (see Lusk-Stover et al., 2016).

Everyday violence is evident in the practice of widowhood in Hindu families in South Asia (Yadav, 2016a). Once married, women are expected to be married for life. The experiences of widowhood may differ significantly due to factors such as caste, ethnicity, age, education, and socio-economic status, and cannot be generalised for all Hindu women. However, discrimination against widows still exists in various forms because the woman's worthiness is still deeply connected to the man she was married to (Yadav, 2016b; Bhattacharyya and Singh, 2018). Like the practice of *Chhaupadi*, violating cultural norms around widowhood has real material effects; indeed, the cultural discourse around widowhood has been constructed such that the widows themselves believe in these discriminatory practices. The impacts of widowhood go far beyond socio-cultural spaces. It has impacts on their entitlement to property, their worth and worthiness, and may lead to abandonment of widows by their own family members in order to protect family wealth. Since the 16th century, widows have gathered in the northern Indian city of Vrindavan, where they have survived by begging and singing devotional songs in temples and living on the street. Despite the dire conditions suffered by the widows, it was not until 2012, that the Indian Supreme Court ruled that the government must provide the widows with food, medical care, and homes (Schultz, 2019; Pande, 2020). Similarly, preference

for a male child, lack of access to inheritance, and male domination are directly related to various forms of violence against women in South Asia (Kimuna and Djamba, 2008; Watts and Zimmerman, 2002).

Further examples of everyday violence abound – violence against women and sexual minorities is pervasive in most societies and range from discriminatory employment practices, polygyny, domestic abuse, sex-selective abortions, child marriage, dowry deaths, and sexual violence. Transnational women's movements from 1945 through the 1970s pushed the language of women's inequality onto the international agenda of the UN, culminating in the adoption of the "Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women" (CEDAW), in 1979. More than 40 years later, CEDAW represents a vehicle of norm translation around which various movements have coalesced, regardless of treaty ratification by individual states (Zwingel, 2016). As part of an opening salvo into the discourse surrounding women's rights and inequalities, CEDAW is "embedded and part of [the] dynamics" of "international and transnational struggles for gender equality [which] are ongoing" (Zwingel, 2016, pp. 60–61).

By the late 1990s and early 2000s, transnational norm discourses around women's rights and violence against women during and after armed conflict emerged. The Rome Statute of the ICC (1998) named sexual violence during war as an international crime, while Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) (and succeeding resolutions) recognised the disproportionate impact of conflict on women and girls and the need to include women in post-conflict reconstruction. The Women, Peace and Security Agenda (WPSA) has emerged as an important tool in addressing conflict-related violence against women (CRVAW), highlighting the continuum of violence that runs from the private, domestic sphere to institutionalised gendered violence that emerges during conflict and war (e.g. Shepherd, 2008; Swaine, 2018; Berry, 2018).

Wartime/peacetime

What has been made clear through a number of studies, is that war does not end with a peace agreement (e.g. Parashar, 2016; Swaine, 2018; Berry, 2018). It continues in post-war societies, highlighting the artificial distinction between war and peace, particularly when societies confront the atrocities that were perpetuated on women during war, such as war-time rape. Although rape and sexual violence do not represent the entirety of violence against women before, during, and after conflict, they are ubiquitous and invite an examination of the ways in which rape is utilised as a form of genocide, as a means of undermining the dignity of the nation, or as a rallying cry for rebuilding nations.

Rape as a tool of war appears to be a characteristic of almost every conflict that has been documented; sexual violence is an ever-present consequence of wartime violence, as well as an act of war itself (Swaine, 2018). Cockburn argues that "while rape serves to humiliate enemy women, it also carries an additional message: it communicates from man to man, so to speak, that the men around the woman in question are not able to protect 'their' women. They are thus wounded in their masculinity and marked as incompetent" (Cockburn, 2009, p. 59). Forced pregnancies serve to dilute ethnic groups, a form of ethnic cleansing, and ritual humiliation.

Rape is also used as a weapon to damage the honour of the nation, imposing what Nayanika Mookherjee calls a "spectral wound" to the national body (2015). D'Costa and Hossain (2010, p. 332), also in reference to the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971, notes that national honour – and indeed, the nation itself – is founded on an imagined unassailable purity of the nation's women; when that is violated, sexual violence against women during war is "largely depicted in the language of loss or harm to the nation, and an assault on the community's *izzat* (honour)".

War rapes and the resulting pregnancies were treated as an assault on Bangladeshi masculinities, while the women were simultaneously treated as war-heroines while facing deep public shame and dishonour (Mookherjee, 2008). The personal tragedies of the women were politicised and reclaimed by nationalist discourses, writing the nation on the bodies of its women.

Cockburn emphasises that there is a link between the personal and international scales of violence that exist in both peace and wartime, linking marital rape in peacetime to military rape in war (Cockburn, 2009, p. 158). Discussing the case of Iraq, Nadje Al-Ali (2016) argues that the sexual violence seen in Iraq after the US invasion did not appear "out of the blue". Iraqi women experienced sexual and gender-based violence both before and after the invasion. She argues that the "perpetrators of sexual and gendered violence exist on a broad spectrum in Iraq, including militia linked to the Iraqi government and other political parties, various insurgent groups who fought against the government and the former occupation, criminal gangs, family members, and until a few years ago, also the occupation forces" (Al-Ali, 2016, p. 11). Al-Ali cautions observers against de-historising and decontextualising sexual violence during and after conflict (Al-Ali, 2016, p. 11; also see Alsaba and Kapilashrami, 2016). In short, sexual violence during and after conflict cannot be understood in isolation, but rather *in relation to* gender-based discrimination that existed before conflict; neither is sexual violence simply a corollary of war, but part of it. When we speak of "peacetime" either before or after conflicts, we must ac-knowledge that "peacetime" itself is a site of gendered violence.

Conclusion

Continuums of violence – or what we have referred to here as the processes of violence – are at once detrimental to women and sexual minorities and also reinforce patriarchal hierarchies of power and elite interests. Artificial dichotomies of private/public and personal/political, and the distinction between wartime and peacetime, obscure how these processes of violence replicate themselves both temporally and spatially.

Feminist work has highlighted the many sites of violence that constitute these processes, particularly the important acknowledgement that there is no "entry" or "exit" from violence, nor is there a linear progression of violence. Indeed, the work on intersectional identities shows us that multiple sites of violence may be experienced simultaneously. Feminist postcolonial theorists and transnational feminist activists draw attention to intersecting identities and the historical contexts of colonial relations that reinforce continuums of violence as a global phenomenon embedded in every institution. Although feminist peace scholarship has advanced in recent years, questions remain about the standards against which one can measure the extent of violence. For example, wartime rape is now acknowledged as a war crime, but that serves to narrow the scope of how sexual violence is conceived – it is constructed as a violation of human rights in the context of war but not in the domestic sphere (Swaine, 2018). International efforts to address gender-based violence continue to be met with resistance by some state actors or suffer from lack of enforcement and oversight.

A final question is related to the consequences of the historic domination of Western feminisms which have slowly begun to de-essentialise the category "woman". How might future feminist peace research speak to the intersectional nature of the continuums of violence that also recognise the effects of race, class, gender, and sexualities, among other identities? How might these identities experience continuums of violence differently and to what degree? Who names this violence? This requires a recognition that the concept of "violence" itself is subject to interrogation and deeper analysis.

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