

UNSCR 1325 - Women, Peace and Security: A Ticket for Women's
Claim to Space in the Public. Institutional practices, travelling
concepts and new research questions.

Erika Svedberg

Assistant Professor of International Relations, Department for Global Political
Studies, Malmö University, erika.svedberg@mah.se

*She's got her ticket. I think she gonna use it. I think she going to fly away.
No one should try and stop her. Persuade her with their powers.
She says that her mind is made.*

Tracy Chapman

**1. Presenting an institutional take: Gender as an everyday practice, war
(violence) as an everyday practice.**

In this paper, I will be mentioning several of the texts originating in the edited volume titled, *Making Gender, Making War. Violence, Military and Peacekeeping Practices* (Kronsell & Svedberg, 2012). In working with the co-authors of the book, and with the conference that preceded it, Annica Kronsell and I wished to focus on how both gender and war (violence) are constructed through everyday institutionalized practices. For years we had talked about the state as being at the centre of this constant and reiterative process. Together with our thirteen co-authors of the book, our aim was to promote a take on *the war question* that emphasized the institutions and norms that, as we saw it, formed the everyday practices of military-and war making. A second undertaking for us all was to problematize masculinity, we wanted to deconstruct masculinity and openly resist the obvious, such as connecting 'masculinity' with violence, or the

male-as-norm. The idea that there is a war question for feminism – originally coined by Christine Sylvester - was, for us as feminist researchers, a call to engage in a research program seeking to uncover how gendered norms and practices are institutionalized and re-affirm a sex/gender system of the-male-as-norm, or, in other words, of male superiority and female inferiority (the most inferior being the children). While gender in itself may be considered a social institution, our approach was narrower and aimed at reaching a deeper insight of security institutions on the state level as well as above the state level.

In *Making Gender, Making War*, the purpose was to show how gendered practices may be found in institutions that are also physical organizations, for example the state apparatus, the military, in actual war-making, in international organizations, in guerrillas or in liberation armies etc. In broad terms, the aim was to pay particular attention to how gendered norms are institutionalized, upheld and recreated in close connection to war. Institutions tend to have pattern-bound effects over time. In the everyday life of the institution, policies are to be interpreted and implemented, routinized. Norms and expectations of what is possible/impossible are embedded in institutions and have implications for practices related to gender. Nevertheless, institutions and the gendered military practices carried out by them, also give rise to criticism and resistance. In addressing these globalized norms of war and post war, the authors of *Making Gender, Making War* look at how gender is carried out in ‘everyday’ practices within institutionalized contexts of war making. This is a highly appropriate research methodology because gender norms tend to become invisible and taken for granted as they are put into everyday practice of the institution (Kronsell & Svedberg, 2012: 4).

With a feminist constructivist approach and an institutional focus, how can we study change and transformation when it comes to war/peace making? The male-as-norm is persistent but, as we have argued, norms are constructed and enacted, performed when individuals engage with them on a daily bases within the institution, for example while doing peacekeeping or military exercises. Since norms are constructed they can also be made to change and transform themselves. This also includes how practices of resistance are being developed and fought for, in different places and contexts; before, during and after the war. To mention a few examples from the book, by potential conscripts vis-à-vis the Turkish military and state, among Finnish female peace-keepers as well as by women in the armed movements of Kashmir and Sri Lanka.

The war question for feminism is a call to feminist researchers to take on theoretical as well as empirical work on trying to answer questions related to war. For decades, Christine Sylvester has insisted that feminist IR scholars take seriously and engage with the task of analysing war. In her latest work, *War as Experience* (2013), Christine Sylvester scrutinizes the new generation of thinking in feminist IR. Today, in times of globalization, we are all touched by war even when we stand ‘outside’ it. However, few traditional security and war scholars are willing to recognize this fact. “Major differences between IR and feminist IR come to light over disparities in research focus and methodological approaches. IR does not conceptualize international relations as encompassing ordinary people and their experiences with the actors and processes it takes as canonical – states, markets, militaries, international organizations, security, development and so on. Feminist IR does [...]” (Sylvester, 2013, 61). Overall, what Christine Sylvester sees when gazing at the landscape of contemporary feminist research on war and security is quite positive; she seems rather pleased with the empirically grounded works of the new generation of feminist IR

scholars. Building on previous feminist research, much of today's younger feminist generation of scholars go theoretically deeper while at the same time being clearly empirically based, into questions relating to war (violence) and gender.

Bold feminist works studying gender, war and security is perhaps today needed more than ever before. What is the relationship between the institutionalized praxis of traditional patriarchal state organizations such as the military and society? We need the type of studies that highlight resistances to violence on an individual as well as a collective level. Critical works that scrutinizes relations between state institutions and the arm's manufacturing, the international political economy and its influences on the choices and decisions made by women and men in their everyday lives in their respective contexts around the world. In *Making Gender, Making War*, we propose that the war question for feminism is as much of a challenge to what constitutes good feminist research in today's globalized world as it could become a potential challenge to the construction of militarized patriarchal gender relations that rule much of the world today.

Cockburn argues for the perception of gender, violence and war as a continuum, where violence runs through it all and unjust gender relations are essential to its perpetuation, because it predisposes our societies to war (Cockburn in Kronsell & Svedberg, 2012). Cockburn's insightful and well-grounded analysis leads us to conclude that any theory that discusses and analyzes war, organized violence and militaries are simply flawed if they do not include a gender dimension. Jeff Hearn's in his chapter of *Making Gender, Making War* shows the many ways that masculinity impacts war making, pushes us to think of gender relations in terms of various masculinities and femininities, themselves imbued with power

orders, hegemony and marginality, that all come to work almost like a resource in the potentiality of war making. Two important insights come out of Hearn's focus on 'the obvious'. One is that gender relations are highly complex and any attempt to naturalize, or essentialize, men and women blinds us to the complexity of gender power relations, and seduces those who buy the message that men simply 'are' the protectors and soldiers while women 'are' those in need of protection. Secondly, it is brought to our attention that every single strategy that has as its aim to end war in the benefit of peace must include not only an analysis of gender relations and gender effects, but perhaps more importantly, a plan for how to change gender relations (Kronsell & Svedberg, 2012: 212).

2. Travelling concepts. Troubled implementations of feminist thought and concepts.

International operations with the purpose to overcome gender inequalities are often designed and implemented without any input from women and men refugees themselves as to what their needs or desires might be. As a rule, the framing of women is merely in terms of their vulnerability. This is echoed in Jane Freedman's chapter of *Making Gender, Making War*: "UNHCR must also be viewed as a huge bureaucracy¹ and one that holds tremendous discursive and institutional power over refugees. This power can be seen to take away possibilities of agency from refugees and displaced people, limiting their participation in any form of planning, implementation or management of operations. It might be argued that one of the reasons for the uneven impact of global norms in this area, is that they are based on frames which represent women refugees principally as vulnerable victims, thus essentialising a particular set of gendered roles, and failing to take into account the underlying

¹ By the mid-1990s UNHCR employed over five thousand staff worldwide.

gendered relations of power.” (Freedman in Kronsell & Svedberg, 2012). Says Jane Freedman: ”As a travelling concept, the meaning of gender mainstreaming will change in each institutional setting, and the success of implementation will also be dependent on institutional characteristics.” As Freedman points out, what is needed are policies to protect women that pushes the institutions to a move beyond a mere focus on “vulnerable” groups, and towards a real integration of a gendered understanding of the global processes which produce refugees, and of the protection needs of these refugees. To implement gender mainstreaming, as it was intended, within these institutions, would mean no less setting off an entire over-haul of one of the institution’s foundational assumptions regarding “the nature” of women, men and gender.

The works presented in *Making Gender, Making War* provide a complex understanding of gender subjectivities that go far beyond the simplifying tendencies that are prevalent in much scholarship, policy circles and in local contexts, i.e. associating women with peace and men with violence and war. Any simplifying formula such as women=peaceful and caring and Men=violent and egoistic, lacks in critical reflection, which in turn silences and delimits a much needed critical discussion and scrutiny of war and violence. Swati Parashar concludes in her work of *Making Gender, Making War*, that it is necessary to recognize that women *can* be violent political agents in their own right and that when women are violent it is not an exception. Not recognizing this, but seeing women simply as victims or mourners ensures that embedded gender power relations, in for example Kashmir and Sri Lanka, are perpetuated, and women’s voices subdued. A more helpful thinking in the long run would be to pay close attention to the complexity of gender subjectivities since it would also ensure that these actors’ agency be recognized because they are seen, not silenced.

3. Conceptualizing UNSCR 1325 in terms of theory building.

The historical legacy of feminism as a social movement is that thoughtful critique (theorizing) coupled with strategic resistance in the right political *fora* and open activism (practice) is crucial in triggering processes of political reform to bring about justice and fairness. The creation of UNSCR 1325 was in itself an enormous victory on the part of a transnational women's movement and since then it has continued to play a central role as it continues to be an arena for feminist/women's activism. The struggle for the actual implementation of UNSCR 1325 becomes a focal point showing how many different conflict contexts form one pattern of oppression. Women's activism forms the pattern of resistance and although it for many of the peace builders is experienced as a painfully slow process they have indeed influenced political outcomes on both local and global levels.

Norms are constructed partly through institutionalized practices and can therefore also be made to change and transform themselves. Policies and objectives can be re-thought, often as a reaction from pressures from social and political actors and movements. Transnational feminism and women's grassroots' activism are important change agents when it comes to gender in international relations and institutions. The day-to-day experience of women's activists who use UNSCR 1325 as a leverage to improve society and gender relations overall have recently been examined in a report by Kvinna till kvinna (2012). The report is titled *Equal Power- Lasting Peace* and consists of five case studies that examine obstacles to women's participation in peace and democratic processes in regions of the world affected by armed conflict. In the report seventy-nine women peace builders have been interviewed and have taken part of focus group discussions regarding what they see as the main challenges in

their work to achieve lasting peace. What comes to the fore in this excellent report is a strong pattern in all of these conflict contexts that women who claim political space suffer tremendously in their personal lives. The number and different types of strategies used to suppress them speaks for itself and the global patterns of sexualized and gendered oppression become all so much clearer. Gender is a concept to help us understand the relational power dynamics of masculinity and femininity; to feminize is to belittle and disempower. To masculinize is to enlarge and empower. In *Equal Power Lasting Peace*, a social structure of domination becomes so real before our eyes that we can almost touch it physically. Women's political theory (feminist political theory) has talked about the workings of this structure for centuries, from Mary Wollstonecraft in the late seventeenth hundreds to Carole Pateman, Iris Marion Young and Wendy Brown in our time. By using feminist political theory we can explain, and quite thoroughly understand, the forces at work here. In effect, what women's activism in the name of UNSCR 1325 does is to challenge the social-political contract described by Locke and other contractarians. Carole Pateman has explained to us its in-built gendered oppressiveness in *The Sexual Contract*. The Public/Private domains are so obviously sexed; the public sphere is men's political sphere whereas the private sphere is the lesser worth women and children's, disempowered, and apolitical, sphere. An emancipatory core and a vibrating force field is built into UNSCR 1325 as it opens up a political space for women, it places women as active agents and participants in the public domain. Selimovic et al, in *Equal Power Lasting Peace*, explain to us that women peacebuilders claim a number of spaces, all of which are spaces of power. The authors of the report talk about three types of spaces where "a striking pattern of exclusion becomes apparent," across all the cases studied (Selimovic et al, 2012: 103). First it is 'Closed Spaces' (decision making arenas as negotiations, institutions and political structures). Second, 'Invited Spaces' in which power holders (as a result of demands from outside) invite other

representatives to participate, observe and/or be consulted. Third, there is a type of new, created space that could be identified as a pattern of the accounts of women peacebuilders in five different conflict cases. Selimovic et al calls this 'claimed spaces': "We understand claimed spaces to be those created by social movements, civil society and other actors in the informal sector. They are public arenas, where claims can be made and issues raised that otherwise are not put on the political agenda" (Selimovic et al, 2012: 105).

UNSCR 1325 both adheres to traditional notions of men's and women's role in war, *and* is the venue for resisting it. To understand this curious paradox we must learn about its past and how it is being used in the present. The feminist theorizing on the conceptual binary Protected/Protector is often used when analysing and problematizing UNSCR 1325 (Carol Cohn among others). Iris Marion Young used this to explain the dangers of the War on Terror launched by President Bush. In accepting President Bush as the Protector and oneself (the US citizen) to be in the role of the Protected, there are many democratic freedoms and rights at stake for the public of the US, says Young (Young, 2005).

Indeed, feminist political theory provides us with the tool box whereby we can analyse the so called 'War on Terror'. When President Bush gives his famous speech following the attack on New York on 9/11, he is in the role of the Head of Household/Protector of the US nation. The domestic, the US public, is located within the Private sphere/they are the Nation/the Household and should (by tradition) accept to be ruled and let go of some civil rights and their claim to a space in the public. In order to be protected, the US public must let go of their right to voice and to question what is being stipulated by the Protector. The benevolent Protector (Bush) must be let to shoulder his burden of protecting those inside the Household/Private sphere/domestic. Using the feminist political

theory tool box, Young shows how war and conflict, in a post 9/11 US context, activates the gendered power dichotomy once again. Applying the theoretical feminist concepts of the Protector/Protected binary we begin to unravel how UNSCR1325 on Women , Peace and Security, can sit comfortably together with traditional thinking of women as needing protection. Arguably, this helped for it to be brought all the way onto the global security agenda and be ratified by most states world-wide. In the obstinate tradition of ‘talking back,’ held by brave women activists however, UNSCR1325 may be transformed, it might “grow up”, become independent, and no longer as be as comfortable to traditional power holders. Indeed, already local women activists and peacebuilders are using UNSCR1325 as a leverage to claim political room for manouvering.

When women claim space in the public sphere, they are on the way towards the realization of women’s human rights. Thirteen years after the adoption of UNSCR 1325 on Women Peace and Security, we are beginning to see the contours of how the experience of merging feminist theorizing and activism open up for new research questions. In this there are several important concepts that will be addressed, I will just now mention the gender/war binary and transnational feminism. After some thirty years of intense, curiosity-driven research and writings, leading feminist scholars maintain that we are only beginning to make sense of the complexity of gender in international relations (Hutchings *et al.* 2008). We have begun to unravel the seemingly simple question of what gender is, or means. Understanding gender as perhaps the most central social institution in the life of humans, a practice that constructs and reconstructs power relations throughout the centuries, remains central. Ontologically speaking, the authors of *Making Gender, Making War* come from a constructivist outlook on gender. We see gender being made and remade through the practices of individuals, organizations, militaries and states. The

making of gender is always part and parcel of what has been called patriarchy, the gender power system, or gender order. Thus, the making of gender implies that gender is an organizing principle for social life. Several chapters of *Making Gender, Making War*, look at the remaking of nation in post-conflict circumstances noting that processes of gender construction seem to play a crucial role. How is gender made when nations are remade in the context of new military practices? In the making of gender we include subjectivities like men and women, masculinities and femininities as well as gender power relations, norms and principles.

What can we learn about transnational feminism and gender subjectivities in the context of war and peace building? According to Nina Lykke, the principles of transnationalism (as women's activist networking across the globe) are intersectional. On the one hand, they challenge both universalistic thinking and relativism at the same time. On the other hand, there is the heuristics of mixed investigation, which allows one to see different sides of the subject and to see the specific, the fragmented; the dialogue with one's subject and reflexivity of the researcher's own position in order to overcome the illusion of the omnipotence of knowledge. Transnational feminism involves a constant taking into account of different dimensions of gender inequality and their intersections (Lykke 2010). Amidst the complexities of war, there is one common normative ambition in the visualization that feminism can be a tool and a method to accomplish positive transformation towards greater justice. Feminism claims that we can leave behind an unjust system that assumes male supremacy, built and maintained by violence. Violence has both a physical and a structural nature, such as the harassment of women activists' families, the exclusion of one's children, sometimes physical violence and exclusion from political participation as so clearly portrayed in *Equal Power-Lasting Peace*. The

violence and harassment are reactions to the force field of UNSCR1325 that local women's groups tap into when they demand to for example, be let into the post conflict negotiations. Thus, women claim their space in the public sphere, resisting the role of the Protected and 'kept' in the private sphere. Yes, some of us have admonished over that UNSCR 1325 was adopted by a global society wishing to take on the role of (active, male) Protector of the (passive, victim) Protected women. However, thirteen years after its adoption, UNSCR 1325 has also – simultaneously - proven to be “the ticket” used by women to get out of the private sphere. UNSCR1325 continues to be used by women activists in conflict contexts across the globe. To use the US poet and singer Tracy Chapman's words: “She says that her mind is made.”

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