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Gender and Post-Conflict Statebuilding

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This synthesis focuses on one of the missing links in the theory and practice of post-conflict statebuilding: gender. After this introduction, it is divided into four parts. The first section briefly introduces the interaction (or lack thereof) between the theory and practice of post-conflict statebuilding and gender. The following section outlines two arguments, one instrumentalist and the other normative, for why gender should matter to statebuilding. The final sections consist of a short conclusion and some implications for policy.

Post-conflict statebuilding is heavily oriented, in both literature and practice, towards institutional reconstitution and reform. Aspects of institutions under consideration include institutional design – that is, how state powers are distributed – and institutional capacity: how state institutions function (or not) (Call 2008: 8-10). As formulated and led by multilateral actors, post-conflict statebuilding typically concentrates on the restoration of those state institutions that reflect those actors' particular priorities, such as institutions necessary for elections, revenue collection, and basic service and internal security provision – within the framework of a larger aid effort oriented towards economic liberalization and growth (Nakaya 2009).[2] Rebuilding capable institutions is also seen as an integral component of efforts to improve or entrench good governance practices, legitimacy, and the rule of law, thus providing an enabling environment for successfully – or at least, non-violently – "negotiating the mutual demands between state and societal groups (CIC and IPA 2008: 14)."

Post-conflict statebuilding: Missing gender

Statebuilding is not peacebuilding, nor is it a process necessarily confined to post-conflict situations. An oft-cited definition of statebuilding is "actions undertaken by international or national actors to establish, reform, or strengthen the institutions of the state which may or may not contribute to peacebuilding (Call and Cousens 2007: 3)"; by contrast, peacebuilding encompasses "actions undertaken by international or national actors to institutionalize peace, understood as the absence of armed conflict and a modicum of participatory politics (*Ibid*)," without a specific focus on institutions. Peacebuilding assumes a recent or ongoing state of armed conflict; statebuilding does not – and indeed, statebuilding interventions are increasingly favored for "fragile" states that are not experiencing significant armed conflict (OECD 2007). This synthesis nevertheless focuses on post-conflict statebuilding, which occurs during a period in which gender issues and gender roles often come into focus.

The definition cited above is useful for its simplicity, but inevitably leaves out more than it contains. Statebuilding is not "merely" about technocratic steps to rebuild institutions, but fundamentally concerns the relationship and distribution of resources between state and society, as well as between state, sub-state, external, and non-state actors, including non-state armed groups (CIC and IPA 2008; Nakaya 2009; Reno 2008; McGovern 2008; Curtis and de Zeeuw 2009). At the same time, and countervailingly, statebuilding and its constituent activities have been securitized in many contexts, in a process that essentially depoliticizes (or puts "above" politics) the statebuilding project (Buzan et al 1998; see also Jennings 2008d) – thus removing space for contestation and dissent relating to what are, in fact, inherently political activities. Statebuilding also builds on the necessary assumption that institutions can be reconstituted given enough time, resources, good intentions, and best practices, regardless of the ways in which, and in whose interests, those institutions functioned in the past – an assumption that seemingly overlooks the extent to which state collapse before and during conflict was a deliberate (if eventually unsustainable) strategy as opposed to an accidental tragedy (Bøås and Jennings 2005, 2009; de Waal 2009; see also Reno 1998).

Interestingly for a concept concerned with state-society relations, security, and the control and distribution of political and economic power, statebuilding literature has little to say about gender. Studies of statebuilding tend to either ignore or

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[2] Nakaya (2009: 3) uses the shorthand "economic liberalization and growth" to refer to privatization, infrastructure development, and economic policy planning, analysis and advice.

seriously under-conceptualize gender, by failing to integrate a gendered approach or even, in most cases, to acknowledge that gender is a viable issue for analytical consideration. A gendered approach entails two overlapping levels of analysis. First, it uses gender as a critical concept for understanding, interrogating, and denaturalizing "the blatant and subtle political workings of both femininity and masculinity (Enloe 2004: 4)" in and across societies, so as to avoid generating naïve and blinkered analysis and explanations. Second, and relatedly, a gendered approach involves focusing on the ways in which the practices under consideration – in this case, statebuilding – differently affect and involve women and men. Gender, of course, cannot be conflated with "women": men are also gendered beings, although in practice, programs and activities classified as "gender-related" tend to predominantly target women.[3] Conversely, the statebuilding literature can often be conflated with "man", as it is normally written both from a male perspective and with men as the default subjects of analysis and action.

Accordingly, it is primarily in the realm of practice where gender is considered and "visible" within post-conflict statebuilding. Statebuilding practice related to gender encompasses such things as: institutional reform, including establishing a gender ministry or creating quotas for women's representation in political parties, government, and the police and armed forces; targeting women in voter registration drives; supporting civil society groups run by or focused on women and their needs; funding health interventions targeted to women (such as maternal and infant health programs); drafting laws against gender-based and domestic violence; including women in statebuilding interventions such as disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) and security sector reform processes; as well as "women-friendly" activities occurring concurrently in the development and peacebuilding spheres. Once in place, these initiatives can be difficult to implement or enforce without sustained attention and pressure, resources, and national (centralized) and local (decentralized) buy-in. Furthermore, activities like DDR that attempt to include or accommodate women, usually as add-ons to the "real" (male) recipients of the program, may do so in problematic ways and with desultory results (see e.g. Jennings 2008a, 2008b; MacKenzie 2007). Without generalizing that post-conflict programming aimed at women is necessarily poorly designed or without impact, it nevertheless seems that such programming can derive as much (or more) from a checklist or from political pressures – the need to "do something" for women – as from a critical assessment of the type entailed in the gendered approach described above.

Why should gender matter to statebuilding?

Why should gender be a matter of concern for statebuilding? Drawing on work done on gender and conflict, and particularly on women's experiences in war and post-war situations (see e.g Pankhurst 2008; Jennings 2008b, 2009; Elshtain [1987] 1995; MacKenzie 2007; El Bushra 2004; Cockburn 2001, 2004; Rehn and Johnson Sirleaf 2002; Meintjes 2001; Lindsey 2001; Sørensen 1998; Utas 2003; Turshen 1998), one can identify two arguments for including gendered analysis and activities in statebuilding: one instrumentalist and the other normative. These overlap – for example, both instrumentalist and normative arguments make claims for including gender in statebuilding on the basis of arguments relating to the roles of women in conflict and post-conflict environments – but have somewhat different aims, priorities, and thresholds for success.

The instrumentalist strand accords to a pragmatic, purportedly apolitical approach to gender and statebuilding: the cluster of issues and programs relating to gender are seen as another tool in the "toolbox" for eventually achieving a sustainable and institutionalized peace. Women's (and men's) experiences in war – as soldiers or armed group members, "sex slaves", or civilians, i.e. as perpetrators and/or recipients of armed, gender-based, or other forms of violence – are used to bolster the importance of targeting some peacebuilding and statebuilding activities to that constituency. This approach is typically less concerned with promoting attitudinal change than behavioral change in society and institutions; it is less about progressive transformation of gender roles than the pragmatic accommodation of specific groups, or the assumption that particular constituencies (e.g. women) bring an inherent and unitary value to the table.[4] The reasoning underlying the enactment of DDR programs, including that in Liberia, is illustrative of the instrumentalist approach. DDR programs are normally considered as a security imperative rather than a "gender issue," but they are highly gendered: default male. The ethical dilemma inherent in "rewarding" ex-combatants through DDR – particularly in places like Liberia, where both state and non-state armed actors preyed on civilians – is overruled by the argument that highly volatile ex-fighters, nearly always identified solely as boys or men, will continue their violent practices unless they receive some kind of material or practical inducement otherwise. Wartime activities and roles, in other words, justify inclusion in the statebuilding agenda under the auspices of DDR and security sector reform, but this inclusion is done less for normative than practical reasons. Where an instrumentalist approach is taken towards gender-related activities in statebuilding, this process works the same way, albeit typically concentrated on women rather than men. However, in such processes the focus tends to be less on women's wartime roles as perpetrators of violence – even in places like Liberia, where women participated as combatants in relatively high numbers (Pugel 2007; see also Jennings 2008b) – and more on their "status" either as victims, as members of a particularly vulnerable group, or as peace agents, thus ignoring a key facet of many

[3] This fact is reflected in the content of this synthesis: where referring to statebuilding practice related to gender, most of the named interventions are women-specific or women-targeted, in line with current practice.

[4] Without dismissing the power of women as social, economic, political and peace agents, it is striking that post-conflict policy literature often treats "women" as a homogenous group. Women rarely get to be spoilers or the instigators and perpetrators of violence, or to have agendas transcending the domestic or the communal. This perception does not capture the complexity of women's roles in and after conflict (see e.g. Lindsey 2001; Anderson 2007).

women's experiences during war while reinforcing gendered stereotypes and "traditional" roles (MacKenzie 2007; Jennings 2008a, 2008b; Lindsey 2001).[5]

In sum, statebuilding activities relating to gender may be based less on a normative agenda for gender equality, and more on the assumption that women's inclusion in social and political life will help consolidate peace and/or improve representation and the quality of governance in reformed state institutions. Political pressures on, and by, donors relating to how statebuilding resources are used are also an important factor. The success and sustainability of the instrumentalist approach hinges on the assumption that institutional and legal change will lead to changes in social norms and behavior. This, in turn, perhaps acknowledges the constraints on external statebuilding actors' ability to influence the host society outside of the institutional/legal and programmatic realms. An instrumentalist approach to gender issues in statebuilding could help some women circumvent the well-documented post-conflict backlash against women (see e.g. Pankhurst 2008, 2003; Jennings 2008; MacKenzie 2007; El Bushra 2004; Cockburn 2004; Meintjes et al 2001); however, insofar as it creates an externally-driven (or imposed) and -enforced "femocracy" (Meintjes 2009), change is likely to be shallow and not lead to broad or lasting transformation.

The normative argument for gendering statebuilding builds upon but goes beyond the instrumentalist, essentially overlaying a progressive normative agenda on the activities that follow from the instrumentalist (and purportedly apolitical) approach. The normative approach differs from the instrumentalist primarily in that gender equality and attention to gender issues are seen as ends in themselves, not means to an end. It is thus a more activist approach, which emphasizes the need for transformative social change in gender roles, and views institutional and legal reforms as necessary but insufficient instruments in that change; in this respect, the normative approach entails developmental and peacebuilding interventions and grassroots efforts as much as statebuilding. The normative approach is most evident in feminist analyses of conflict and post-conflict environments – which tend to acknowledge some of the positive effects that conflict may have for gender roles (Meintjes 2009) – and in the work of activists and civil society groups. As evident above, however, normative arguments for gendering statebuilding have not yet penetrated statebuilding literature, while the impact on statebuilding practice may be more rhetorical than real – that is, providing normative language and gloss for programs enacted for instrumentalist reasons. Speculatively, this may be because such concerns are seen as too idealistic, ambitious, or too much like social engineering for the task of statebuilding, or exist too far outside the realm of security considerations that underpin and justify many statebuilding projects. Moreover, embarking on an explicitly transformative, progressive gendered agenda would require political consensus among intervening actors and donors, much greater resources, longer time horizons, and close relationships with interlocutors at the local as well as national levels.

Conclusion

The arguments outlined above notwithstanding, it remains that an awareness of gender and gender issues has not adequately penetrated statebuilding theory and practice. Statebuilding theory continues to operate from a "default male" perspective. Statebuilding practice, meanwhile, tends to be done by checklist, or to be overly self-reflective – driven by donors' notions of what people in a particular society need or want, based on the priorities of men and women in the donors' own societies. It also tends to be insufficiently attentive to the prospects of eventual implementation and enforcement, rather than substantive and attuned to the many dynamics in a society that influence the possibility of sustainable and effective change.

Accordingly, the growing body of critical and empirical work on women's experiences during and after war should be used more systematically in order to inform and improve the thinking and practice of statebuilding, whether in the pursuit of instrumentalist or normative goals. Relatedly, statebuilders should be wary of representing women's role in conflict solely as passive victims or, conversely, homogenizing women's roles in post-conflict environments as only peace agents or peacemakers. Both designations obscure the totality of women's experience in and after war, reinforcing specific gendered stereotypes that feed into a post-conflict backlash against women, while simultaneously marginalizing those women that played different – and perhaps, more socially and ethically challenging – roles during conflict. Moreover, conflating women and peacemakers seemingly promotes a kind of biological determinism, in which women's capacity to bear children translates into diffuse and overarching qualities of caregiving, nurturing, and problem-solving; these in turn translate into making and keeping peace. Notwithstanding the problematic designation and assignation of universal "female" characteristics, this approach essentially precludes attempts to critically examine the larger political and socio-economic project to which women's "peacemaking" capacities are ostensibly integral, by "turn[ing] a critical term ('gender') into an instrument for problem-solving goals (Whitworth 2004: 120)."

This leads to a key point: so long as the statebuilding process approaches gender from a technicist or problem-solving rather than critical perspective, the effectiveness of any attempts to gender statebuilding will be extremely constrained. There is value even in instrumentalist attempts to gender statebuilding. However, statebuilding actors must also recognize the limitations of such an approach in achieving broad and lasting change. For more sustained, transformative change of

[5] It is well-documented that gender roles tend to evolve during conflict, often to the benefit of women: the absence of men (or need for more fighting power) opens up space for women to take on roles previously dominated by, or considered the sole domain of, men (see e.g. Lindsey 2001; Meintjes 2001; Pankhurst 2008). Thus, the task in post-conflict environment may be less the wholesale transformation of gender roles in society, than the continued transformation and consolidation of processes started during conflict – often in the face of backlash from groups of men attempting to re-assert their "traditional" roles and authority in the domestic and public spheres.

the type envisioned by the normative approach, what is needed is to elevate "gender" from just another box on a checklist to a way of looking at the world – not to segregate and discriminate but to question, analyze and include. Thus far, the theory and practice of statebuilding has not made much of an attempt to explore these purportedly unrealistic ways of thinking about and confronting gender.

Policy implications

1. A critical gendered approach should be integral to any conflict history or post-conflict needs assessment that form the basis for subsequent statebuilding or peacebuilding interventions.

2. Statebuilders must be aware of the gendered impact of their presence and activities, especially in relation to their participation in and influence on the highly gendered post-conflict and peacekeeping economies,[6] and their acceptance or furtherance of "traditional" justice systems, hierarchies, and means of normative and social control.

3. Tradeoffs are involved in attempts to gender statebuilding: the instrumentalist approach may operate better in light of the constraints statebuilders face in attempting to foster societal change from the outside, but may also result in shallow and unsustainable outcomes; while the normative approach may eventually foster more transformative social change, but at the cost of a much greater investment of time and resources, and dependent upon deep and lasting relationships with a range of national and local interlocutors.

4. The role of gender advisor in the UN system should be empowered and should entail increased rigor, so that gender advisors are in a position to apply a gendered perspective to the totality of what a UN-led or -coordinated statebuilding intervention is (and is not) doing, and can have a clear line to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in order to express misgivings or concerns.

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[6] On peacekeeping economies, see Rehn and Johnson Sirleaf (2002); Jennings (2008b; 2009).

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