

Gendering Human Security : From Marginalization to Integration of Women in Peacebuilding
Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, Fafo Programme for International Co-Operation and Conflict Resolution, 2001.

In the new wars, civilian population has become the main target of warfare, and sexual violence against women has become a widespread strategy of these wars which aim at the destruction of the social fabric of societies. “The nature of these wars has [therefore] made human security, particularly the protection of civilians in time of conflict, an important focus of international attention”.

Women’s agency in war is often expanded, war opening opportunities for women to occupy social positions which usually are closed to them, but when peace returns, women’s agency is often immediately forgotten and women are coerced back to socially subordinate positions. Any role gained by women through war is seen as temporary, “the result is that a female dominated civilian population has become a common characteristic of contemporary conflict areas”. But women are also specific targets of violence during war, by the opposing party, organized rape camps being the most extreme example of the targeting of women, or by masculinist assumptions women fall victims of in conflict situation.

In the **post-conflict phase**, which often only means a formal halt of hostilities while violence and lawlessness remains pervasive, establishing basic security is thus a prime objective, yet in this phase “women tend to experience a backlash”. Men come back traumatized from the experience of war, have difficulties in adapting due to unemployment and general dislocation of the family and social fabric. They contest the roles women have taken up in their absence, and after-war periods are in fact often synonymous with elevated rates of domestic violence, while nevertheless women *are* the main security networks for men as they return from combat or detainee camps. Widows and wives of missing persons will also be confronted with additional legal and economic stress. Post-conflict gender relations are thus characterized by stagnation, if not regression.

In **peace operations**, “human security, or the protection of the people, is a major focus”. Peace building missions today are also multi-functional, and involve a wide variety of staff, including non-military, this should therefore be an opportunity for women to be better integrated in peace operations as actors and recipients of assistance. But unfortunately women can be left out or even adversely affected, directly or indirectly, in consequence of the ground presence of peace keeping troops or humanitarian assistance workers, which have on occasion been found committing sexual abuses of local women and children. Such personnel are often essentially male, and cannot be prosecuted under local laws. More female staff is thus needed in peace-keeping operations (PKOs), and women will also “bring a diversity of experiences”. Gender mainstreaming in PKOs needs to remain a priority.

The transition from conflict to peace is also an opportunity to better include **women in decision-making**, for all too often gender advisors or experts are not present during negotiations preceding a peace agreement and few women are chosen to be those representing the parties negotiating. Unfortunately “women’s work and approaches are simply not recognized as relevant”. There is therefore a need to “support women’s organizations as a strategy to integrate gender issues in peace processes”, to increase representation of women in international agencies at high levels of management, and to increase gender awareness in post-conflict negotiations.

Finally, women’s legal status in post-conflict environments is supposedly protected by international humanitarian law, but unfortunately in these transitions domestic laws play “a more important role and these can present significant challenges to the status of women in society”. In many cases women have lost the right to land and property as they are widowed. Therefore, close attention must be paid to gender relations in the efforts to reinstate the rule of law and an equitable legal and justice system.