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Fractious holism: the complex relationship between women and war

Feminists have agreed to disagree on the interaction between women and war. This is elucidated by means of a critical assessment of the various positions of feminists regarding comprehensive human security in general and military security in particular. It is argued that a feminist perspective has the potential to raise consciousness and contextualise women's insecurity by employing gender as a principle of social organisation. This argument is supported by the contention that the relationship between women and war may be characterised as a fractious holism dominated by difference and multiplicity rather than harmony and stability. Such an imperfect holism gives rise to a plurality of ambiguities and complexities in relation to globalisation, militarism, combat and the broadly conceptualised notion of gender violence.

Gefragmenteerde holisme: die komplekse verhouding tussen vroue en oorlog

Feministe verskil onderling oor die interaksie tussen vroue en oorlog. Dit word onder die soeklig geplaas by wyse van 'n kritiese ontleding van die gedifferensieerde feministiese standpunte rakende omvattende menslike sekuriteit in die algemeen en militêre veiligheid in die besonder. Dit word aangevoer dat die feministiese perspektief oor die potensiaal beskik om, deur middel van gender as 'n kategorie van ontleding, groter bewussyn rondom die onveiligheid van vroue te bevorder. Die argument word gerugsteun deur die standpunt dat die verhouding tussen vroue en oorlog 'n gefragmenteerde holisme verteenwoordig, waar verskille en veelvuldigheid eerder as harmonie en stabiliteit heers. 'n Onperfekte holisme lei tot 'n veelvoud van dubbelsinnighede en ingewikkeldhede met betrekking tot globalisering, militarisme, vegertery en die breë begrip geslagtelike geweld.

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Feminism has not quite known whether to fight men or to join them; whether to lament sex differences and deny their importance or to acknowledge and even valorize such differences; whether to condemn all wars outright or to extol women's contributions to war efforts.

These words of Elshtrain (1994: 133), in her seminal work *Women and War*, epitomise the complexity of the relationship between women and war once gender is introduced as a unit of analysis in the debate on security. The introduction of a third variable, namely globalisation, complicates the connection even further. This is relatively unfamiliar terrain, and Clark (1999: 108) remarks: "Of all the potential manifestations of globalization, those in the security domain have been the least systematically explored". Conflicting perspectives on security are played out against the background of a global order which apparently strives to incorporate all cultures, structures and peoples of the world into a single global society. To its fiercest critics this increasing interconnectedness represents a continuation of the process of colonisation, exploitation and domination. Others view globalisation as a universal panacea. Some liberals have heralded the so-called borderless world as bringing equality, prosperity, peace and freedom to all (Scholte 1998: 18).

The complexity of feminist perspectives on security is underpinned by a number of factors. Firstly, in an ideological and disciplinary sense, feminist scholarship is certainly not monolithic. Theories of gender difference, inequality and oppression co-exist in an uneasy yet unavoidable liaison. This diversity of perspective becomes evident in all dimensions of security — not only the military. Opinions on socio-economic security have to take cognisance of divergent views of women in development. Similarly, the ecofeminist position on ecological security has to accommodate controversial essentialist assertions of biological difference alongside more mainstream liberal viewpoints. Secondly, trans- or multi-disciplinary feminist scholarship draws on the diverse inputs of sociology, anthropology, psychology and political science, among other disciplines. Such diversity invariably complicates the analysis of any subject matter through the lens of gender. In the final instance, since feminist analysis embraces human motives, relationships and behaviour (cf Terriff *et al* 1999: 97), a feminist perspective on security cannot be reduced to simple

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charts and diagrams. Instead, feminist analysis forms a web-like network of relational links ranging from the individual to the global level. It further introduces subjective understandings, such as women's experience at the individual level, to the analysis.

Since the start of the post-Cold War period, the notion of a broadened human security concept, including military/physical as well as political, economic, societal and environmental dimensions, has gained acceptance. Feminists, too, define security in multi-level and multi-dimensional terms. With the opening up of the debate, feminist perspectives on international relations as a discipline and on the security discourse as one of its key components have increasingly criticised the gendered nature of the state and the military as the guardian of national interest. For the contemporary security discourse it has therefore not been "business as usual" since the introduction of a gender perspective. Neither skewed gender representations nor apparently gender-neutral analyses have escaped the critical scrutiny of feminists.

This article contends, first, that a feminist perspective has the potential to raise consciousness and to contextualise women's insecurity by utilising gender as a principle of social organisation. A connection is made between the all-pervasiveness of gender within social structures and relations and the ubiquitous nature of human insecurity. However, neither the contemporary security discourse nor feminism as an intellectual enterprise and political project should be treated as completely holistic. Holism is very useful as an intellectual framework, but may be counterproductive if it elevates unity or harmony at the expense of difference. This article must therefore be seen as part of a "fractious holism" in which interdependence does not necessarily imply equality and stability. On the contrary, the tolerance of identity in difference should be what shapes a truly secure community. In commenting on the diversity within ecofeminism, Sisson Runyan (1992: 135-6) remarks that

[a]n ecofeminist politics informed by fractious holism would entail resisting the ideal of harmony and stability even as feminists struggle to create more [...] just homes within our overlapping [...] environments.

Secondly, it is argued that the feminist contribution to a deeper understanding of the dynamics of the relationship between women, war, peace and security is complex in both a negative and a positive sense. One invariably detects a degree of intolerance not only among feminists of different persuasions, but also in relation to non-feminists. Elshain (1994: 133-4) maintains in this regard that feminists' scant regard for consistency, coupled with the fact that they "are not only at war with war but with one another, as well as being locked in combat with women not self-identified as feminist", has clouded their contribution. Nevertheless, feminists "nurture" a complex reconceptualisation of the narrow concept of military security as meaning more than the absence of threat from war, invasion or the use of physical force. Feminists conceptualise security as including protection against all forms of violence, particularly violence against women. Violence and patriarchy are fundamentally linked, as are private and public violence. In addition, at the empirical level, what women do in war and in war-related occupations in civilian life is not straightforward either. Women's involvement in war involves a wide variety of complex roles: from being wives, mothers and sex workers to being attached to the military establishment (regular forces) and participating in liberation struggles or in peace movements.

In the light of the central argument, the purpose of this article is therefore to highlight the complex nature of the feminist perspective on security, with special reference to contending feminist perspectives regarding globalisation and militarism; the inclusion of women in the military, particularly in combat positions, and gender violence. The aim is to show how the feminist perspective on security not only highlights women's position in relation to war, but also offers a comprehensive critique of the contemporary security discourse. The critique then paves the way for the presentation of an alternative conceptualisation of global security which is intended ultimately to serve the interests of both women and men.

The article begins with an exploration of the context by focusing on the complex relationship between globalisation, gender and security. This is followed by a survey of empirical evidence of women's multiple roles during times of war and peace. This diversity is reinforced by the ambiguous nature of feminist perspectives on gender,

patriarchy, militarism, and combat, which are the focus of the following section. In the final part of the discussion the multifarious conflicting views and realities regarding women and war are synthesised in the feminist conceptualisation of gender violence.

1. Women's security in context: the effects of globalisation

It is quite commonplace to typify globalisation as the combination of processes working together to create a single global society based on the principle of interdependence or interconnectedness.¹ From this it follows that no one is completely untouched by events, irrespective of territorial distances or borders (Scholte 1998: 18). This could create the misapprehension that men and women are similarly affected by globalisation. In fact, women are often more adversely affected by global trends. This issue has recently received attention. As both developed and developing nations, together with multinational corporations, have intensified their efforts at globalisation, protests and transnational citizen action at major economic and trade negotiation sites such as Seattle, Washington DC, Prague, Davos and Quebec City, have increased, exposing the uneven effects of globalisation. The argument that globalisation is a means to exploit poorer nations more efficiently (all in the name of openness) is rapidly gaining legitimacy. Linking this issue to the critical question "whose security?" implies that the security of those who hold power in society — that is, men and the "male" state² — prevails. Marginalised voices such as those of women are therefore effectively silenced, not only by existing socio-political practices within states, but also by the greater and omnipotent global context in which we exist. The post-Cold War concept of human security inclusively defined by the Bonn Declaration (1991) as "the absence of threat to human life, lifestyle and culture through the fulfilment of basic needs" (Solomon 1998: 7) therefore still rings false in terms of its seemingly gender-neutral stance.

1 Cf among others Albrow & King 1990, Giddens 1990, Cox 1994, and Robertson 1992.

2 To be discussed in more detail in the section on militarism.

If globalisation is taken as an independent variable and both the relation between women and war and the state of women's security *vis-à-vis* human security as dependent variables then a picture of immense complexity emerges. There are two important complicating factors:

- First, as indicated above, no consensus seems to exist on the nature and effects of globalisation — to the extent that distinguishing between myth and reality necessitates further analysis.
- Secondly, the link between globalisation and security is, curiously, a most under-researched area. This lack of attention certainly precludes clearer insight into what is already a complicated relationship.

In the analysis that follows, arguments for and against globalisation and the relation between globalisation and human security will be discussed in a general sense. Gender will then be introduced as an analytical category utilised in order to explain why women's security is so often adversely affected by the forces of globalisation.

1.1 Contending schools of thought

With regard to the first complication, the existence of at least three schools of thought on this global phenomenon exacerbates the lack of precise definition for the term "globalisation". Held *et al* (2000: 2-10) identify three broad but distinctive accounts of globalisation, namely the hyperglobalist, the sceptic, and the transformationalist schools of thought.³

Proponents of the hyperglobalist thesis, such as Ohmae (1995), welcome the dawning of a new global era in which traditional nation-states play a minimal role and the marketplace reigns supreme. In the context of economic globalisation, states are relegated to the position of transmission belts for global capital and find themselves "sandwiched" between increasingly powerful local, regional and global agents of governance (Held *et al* 2000: 3). Neoliberals believe that globalisation will reduce inequalities within and between states and

3 These approaches represent broad analytical categories or trends in the debate. For the purposes of this discussion differences of opinion within a school and among individual theorists will not be considered in detail.

increase co-operation through economic interdependence. In the context of security, Ohmae avers that global economic security is in the process of replacing military-based security (Tickner 1999: 44).

Sceptics, however, point out that the gulf between the poor and the rich has widened. Hirst & Thompson (1999) offer a powerful critique of the so-called uniqueness of economic globalisation. They dispute the notion that national governments are powerless in the face of global trends. One of the reasons for this myth is the fact that globalisation is often analysed in a historical vacuum. An internationalised economy is not a manifestation unique to the present era. The period between 1870 and 1914 was characterised by a perhaps higher degree of openness and integration than we have today. Another reason for scepticism is the gross overestimation of the transnational character of companies. Most companies are simply multinationals with international trade links. Furthermore, the uneven distribution and movement of finance and capital between the developed and the underdeveloped worlds and the domination of a tripolar economic system (North America, Europe and Japan) also mitigate the omnipotence of globalisation. By means of "membership" of an economic bloc, powerful nations are able to regulate economic trends and financial flows.⁴ While critics of globalisation have noted that women are disproportionately represented among the poorest of the poor, little attention has been paid to this matter.

While transformationalists see the economic dimension as important, they adopt a broader and more holistic view of globalisation as an essentially transformative phenomenon. Giddens (1990) and Rosenau (1997), for instance, view globalisation as historically unprecedented, to the extent that both states and societies world-wide are experiencing profound change. Great uncertainty and complexity mark this new order, since the distinctions between international and domestic affairs have become blurred. Unlike the other two schools of thought with their neatly fixed arguments for or against globalisation, transformationalists emphasise the dynamic and open-ended nature of the process, they see as inherently long-term. Hence they refuse to make any predictions about the future trajectory of globalisation.

4 Cf Hirst & Thompson 1999: 2; Smith & Baylis 1998: 9-10.

1.2 Globalisation, security and gender

The second complicating factor concerns the nexus between globalisation and security. The most popular line of argument in this regard is to apply the hyperglobalist contention that the state has lost its economic regulatory purpose in the security domain. According to this view, globalisation has transformed the security environment to such an extent that states can no longer guarantee their own safety or that of their citizens. Clark (1999: 107), however, contends that such thinking is deeply flawed. It creates the impression that globalisation is simply an external process imposed from the outside. This is misleading, because — as Guehenno (Clark 1999: 108) states — globalisation does not merely change the external environment within which states operate, but simultaneously reflects internal change in the very nature of security states themselves. In a positive sense, it could be argued that globalisation, with its increased interdependence among state and non-state actors, has created increased interest in the notion of co-operative (collective) security. More negatively, it could also be argued that the socio-economic inequality deriving from globalisation could ignite increased tension and conflict.

The perplexing question which then arises is: to what extent can the state's loss of control over its own security be attributed to the processes of globalisation? In view of the above-mentioned argument no clear-cut answer to this question is forthcoming. This indicates that the link between security and globalisation is non-linear and ambiguous. This ambiguity is heightened when the linkage is extended from globalisation and security to globalisation, gender and security. Security and globalisation are related in four ways, namely in terms of:

- the distancing of security from territoriality,
- the impact of globalisation on a new extended security agenda,
- the diminished capacity of the state to provide security for its citizens, and
- the existence of global networks of security (Clark 1999: 114-23).

All four of these interrelated areas have a bearing on women's security.

First, the narrow state-centred paradigm of security is firmly linked to the notion of the protection of a national interest confined to a specific sovereign territory. But with the advent of nuclear weapons, the increased momentum of the forces of globalisation, and the proliferation of international regimes and common markets, the concept of territoriality has become progressively unbundled.⁵ The implications of the rise of extraterritoriality for women are numerous. Tickner (1999: 47) maintains that

[g]iven the increase in global inequality, the feminization of poverty, and the discriminations that women often face when they attempt to participate in the global market, feminist scholarship is questioning the triumphalist story of a borderless world.

Secondly, globalisation manifests itself in the setting of new security agendas and the creation of new security problems. The security issues which emerge assume many forms. Some, like the environment and nuclear proliferation, pose dangers of global magnitude and necessitate global and/or regional co-operation. Others, like ethno-nationalism, gender issues, cultural differences and regionalism, raise important questions about the politics of identity. Together these and other issues embody the twin processes of fragmentation and integration which characterise the world we live in. Clark (1999: 118) identifies the movement of populations as a result of short-term emergencies (ie refugees) as an important aspect of globalisation with the potential to engender further tension and insecurity. It is a well-known fact that women, children and the elderly comprise 80% of the world's refugees. The economic agenda of globalisation also generates intense competition, thus promoting high levels of economic insecurity.

The effects of globalisation on women's economic insecurity can only be understood once gender is used as a category of analysis in the

5 It would, however, be foolhardy to assume that security has completely lost its territorial base. Globalised tendencies have not replaced conventional state-centred thinking. In Africa, in particular, Ayoob believes that strong territorially organised states are the only bulwark against increased conflict and anarchy (Hudson 2000: 83). In theory this may augur well for human security in general, but the reality of the situation in many developing states is that the state has often been the root cause of insecurity among its people through its protection of élite interests.

context of a holistically interpreted concept of human security. It is a mistake to think that women have been excluded from global restructuring — they participate while remaining invisible. One of the explanations for this state of affairs is that patriarchy, which is embedded in local and national structures, interacts with the global market and international financial institutions in ways that can be detrimental to women. Some of the most pertinent aspects of women's involvement in the global economy may be summarised as follows:⁶

- despite significant differences in areas such as race and class, a disproportionately high number of women are located at the bottom of the socio-economic scale (the feminisation of poverty);
- almost 30% of all households are headed by women;
- female heads of households are overrepresented in the informal sector, which is known for its plentiful supply of cheap labour — partially accounting for women's relative poverty;
- work is narrowly defined to exclude women's unpaid work;
- women form the backbone of agriculture in developing societies, yet are often forced to be subsistence providers while men control cash crops, and
- most significantly, in the area of structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) women are most detrimentally affected. Cuts in social welfare services and subsequent rises in food prices all contribute to increased poverty, increased workload, health problems and malnutrition in children.

Women should not, however, be regarded as passive victims of globalisation. Throughout the world they are actively campaigning against its unequal effects. Such initiatives are in accord with human security's emphasis on social justice ("positive" peace). Always to oppose the state and its hegemonic consequences is simply not realistic. As Tickner (1999: 57) remarks, "feminists risk irrelevance if they do not fight to ensure women's rights and access to resources *under the prevailing social conditions*" [emphasis mine]. Disunity among feminists (see Elshtain's observation above as well as the ideological divide between the feminists of the North and the South) concerning

6 Cf in this regard Hudson 1998: 63-71 and Tickner 1999: 50-5.

the most appropriate means of resisting globalisation could easily become an obstacle to collective action. However, most feminists agree on the link between patriarchy, the gendered division of labour and its detrimental effects on women's economic security.

Thirdly, in respect of the reduction of the state's capacity to provide security, two issues are worth mentioning. First, the state's loss of control over defence production and technology and its consequently diminished security capacity may be seen as consequences of globalisation (Crawford in Clark 1999: 119). Secondly, the unprecedented growth in the privatisation of security is an example of the state's "contracting-out" its traditional responsibilities and services. While this may be seen as an encouraging move towards demilitarisation, other tendencies seem to suggest the opposite. Mercenaries are increasingly used to conduct peacekeeping operations (such as in Sierra Leone), since they are not constrained by the conventional peacekeeping principles of neutrality, consent and non-utilisation of force. Using former soldiers as peacekeepers could also lead to increased militarisation among peacekeeping missions, thus blurring the distinction between peacekeeping and peace enforcement. Feminist analysis in general would vehemently oppose the fostering of a culture of militarism within the context of peacekeeping, as militarism and patriarchy are fundamentally connected.⁷

Finally, globalisation has contributed towards the creation of global security networks, particularly in the production, supply and exchange of defence hardware and technology. Factors such as the escalating cost of military technology, consequent cuts in defence procurement budgets, privatisation, the relative internationalisation of the arms industry, and the dependence of military technology on civilian technology have eroded the national defence industry's base (Clark 1999: 116).

The complexity of the argument relates in part to the fact that, as always, such claims require qualification. The feminist critique of military spending and its detrimental effects on the welfare of poor, powerless women is well documented. Tickner (1994: 49), for exam-

7 The relationship between gender, patriarchy and militarism is discussed in detail in subsequent sections of this article.

ple, explains that capital-intensive military ventures divert funds from labour-intensive activities, thus leading to a rise in unemployment in general, but in particular for women employed in light manufacturing industries. Sivard (Reardon 1993: 95-6; Steans 1998: 127-8) identifies military expenditure as one of the main factors contributing to structural violence in the developing world — between 1975 and 1985, for instance, arms imports amounted to 40% of the increase in their foreign debt. The World Bank has estimated that one-third of the debt repaid annually by developing countries is for the purchase of military equipment. One would therefore expect a positive correlation between globalisation, a decrease in military spending, and the creation of global industrial security networks, implying minimised social and economic insecurity for women in particular. Indeed, in the post-Cold War period there has been a sharp downward trend in conventional arms production and arms imports by developing countries. However, the source of the problem, namely both a deeply entrenched culture of militarism and the military industrial complex's vested interest in maintaining existing force and procurement levels, cannot be expected to disappear overnight. In Europe, cuts in military spending did not produce any noticeable peace dividend. In fact, the savings on military expenditure were reallocated to reducing budget deficits during a time of recession (Dunne 1996: 1). In the context of the developing world it is doubtful whether military savings can be translated into benefits for education, health, welfare and housing.

The preceding section has emphasised the complex interaction between multiple perspectives on globalisation and security in the post-Cold War era as well as the implications thereof for the security of women. Having thus sketched the context of women's security, the following section will offer a brief survey of women's roles in war and peace.

2. Empirical evidence: multiple roles of women during war and peace

The picture which emerges is extremely complex, because women have played a vast array of very diverse roles throughout the ages, many of which have been of an indirect or symbolic nature.⁸ The gendered divide between private and public manifests itself here as a dichotomy: men fighting one another at the "battlefront" to protect women located at the "homefront". Furthermore, the statistical evidence of women's representation in the military often obscures the "true" face of a gendered military institution. Numbers alone do not fully explain the cultural, religious and other dynamics within a specific context. In addition, different kinds of war and of military organisations will create different circumstances for the integration of women in the armed forces. "Women" should not be treated as a monolithic category either. Variables such as race, age, education, economic status, family situation, and personality all work together to determine what women actually do in wartime and how they are affected by it. Concomitantly, women contribute to the militarisation of society in both material and ideological terms. Women have helped men to act like men by playing varied roles during wartime — wives, mothers or sex workers providing for soldiers; entertainers; victims; nurses, or spies (Steans 1998: 115). Ironically, despite their significant contribution, these women are often denigrated as mere "camp followers". This "complicity" has also to some extent reinforced women's inferior position in the military.

In this section the roles of women in the regular and paramilitary forces will be briefly examined in order to highlight the complex interrelation between women and war. Since non-feminist writers often overlook the role of military women and some feminist peace researchers tend to overemphasise women's role as peacemakers, this article will pay more specific attention to military women than to civilians.

8 The emphasis in this article on women's direct involvement in the military and paramilitary forces is not intended to suggest that their indirect roles behind the lines (in the place of men and/or as refugees), in peace movements, or in politics, are either insignificant or straightforward.

2.1 Women in the regular forces

Karamé (1999: 7) acknowledges the fact that it is very difficult to obtain an accurate estimate of women's representation in the armed forces due to the reluctance of many states to divulge information about the size of their military personnel. It can, however, be stated with relative certainty that in the regular forces the ratio of non-combatants to combat soldiers is seven to one.⁹ In 1998, 580 000 women served in the forces of 25 states. China, Russia and the United States (USA) between them account for just under 85% of all military women, who comprise just over 2.5% of the world's more than 22 million regular military personnel. Only in seven countries, namely Australia, Canada, China, New Zealand, Russia, South Africa and the USA (and possibly also in Israel), do women make up more than 10% of the regular military forces (Skjelsbæk & Smith 2001: 5-6). Canada and the USA have the highest percentage: 12% of their regular armed forces are women.

However, the figures tend to obscure the kinds of functions that women fulfil within the armed forces. In theory women in the USA military are not supposed to be combatants, yet in practice (for example in Panama and Iraq) they have been. This prevention of women from combat makes a mockery of the fact that American women fought in the War of Independence, the Civil War, and against the native American Indians, as well as in both world wars and the Korean and Vietnam Wars. While the emphasis on providing equal opportunities for all citizens — one of the trademarks of a liberal democracy — has allowed women (particularly Afro-American women) to enter the forces, the USA military still remains a fundamentally gendered, masculine institution (Karamé 1999: 8, 12-4). Furthermore, countries such as Belgium, Denmark, Greece, Luxembourg, Norway, Portugal, Spain, and South Africa, which have no combat exclusion policies (Cock 1992: 19-20), nevertheless ambiguously fail to utilise women routinely in combat roles. French women can occupy all positions, but may not join the Foreign Legion. In Britain women are restricted to administrative and support roles,

9 Non-combatants are usually responsible for support functions such as medical services, supplies, transport, communications, and intelligence.

while Canada excludes women from service on submarines. In Germany women are only permitted to function in the medical services and the military brass bands (Karamé 1999: 8).

In Mali, Guinea, and Israel women are subject to conscription. This, however, should not be construed as the relative level of equality enjoyed by women in society at large. In fact, in the case of the Israeli Defence Force, conscription simply masks the gendered nature of the institution. Women's period of service is shorter than that of men (eighteen months for women compared to three years for men); married women are automatically exempt from military service; women are not allowed to serve in combat positions, and women cannot command in the field, which effectively excludes them from key decision-making structures (Karamé 1999: 9). The hypocrisy of this situation is all the more striking when one considers that, in Israel, as in the former Soviet Union and Germany, women were permitted to participate in combat during times of grave national insecurity but afterwards excluded from the armed forces (Cilliers *et al* 1997: 4).

What the above examples illustrate is that the situation is context-bound and that due to great differences between the policies of various states any attempt at generalisation becomes futile. The statistical evidence relating to women's representation should therefore not be taken at face value. A similar predicament with respect to women and peacekeeping exists.

2.1.1 Women in peacekeeping missions

Since the late 1980s, the move to include the social or human dimension in peace operations has resulted in an increased focus on the role of civilians as "tools" in the peacebuilding process. Hence, "new" or multi-dimensional peacekeeping has enabled more women to play new roles within peacekeeping as legal or political advisors, election or human rights monitors, information specialists or administrators. Yet, closer study reveals that peacekeeping operations, both on the ground and at the decision-making level, remain firmly in the hands of males.

It is now generally recognised that in situations of conflict prevention and peacebuilding it is beneficial for a team to include both

men and women. Women can contribute in this regard at two inter-related levels:

- the internal dimension, where they can positively influence social relations within operations, and
- the external dimension, which relates to their contact with the local population through interaction with women in culturally and politically sensitive situations.¹⁰

However, neither the increase in civilian duties nor the recognition of the special contribution of women has fundamentally altered the gender balance of peacekeeping missions. Organisations such as the United Nations (UN) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) do not as yet have any official policy on the recruitment of women for peacekeeping operations. The beginning of the 1990s was a watershed in terms of the representation of women in peacekeeping. Until then, women played a largely invisible role in UN peacekeeping. Between 1957 and 1979, only five of the 6 250 peacekeeping troops utilised were women. From 1957 to 1989, only 20 out of about 20 000 military personnel involved in peacekeeping were women. By 1993, 11 of 19 UN peacekeeping missions had significant civilian components, and women constituted one-third of the international UN civilian staff (Helland & Kristensen 1999: 78). Yet, despite this increase, women are still grossly underrepresented, particularly in the top decision-making structures of the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO). In 1994, only 5% of the professionals in the Military Advisors Office of the DPKO were women. In the Field Administration and Logistics Division (FALD) of the DPKO, only 4.2% were women (Beilstein 1995: 2, 6).

Women's involvement in military peacekeeping remains limited. In 1993, women comprised only 1.7% of military contingents in a total of 17 peacekeeping missions (Beilstein 1995: 2). In 1999, the Golan Heights mission (UNDOF) had the highest involvement of women in the military section (3.6%). During the same period, no women participated in the military components of the Georgia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Guatemala and Pakistan missions (Olsson 1999: 21-2; Helland & Kristensen 1999: 92).

¹⁰ Cf Helland & Kristensen 1999: 82-7; Olsson 1999: 16-8, 22, 31-2; Hicks Stiehm 1999: 55-6; Beilstein 1995: 9.

Any mission involving the Nordic countries, the USA, Canada, France or Australia is likely to have a high percentage of female participation. Yet figures which seem high may not always be really significant. 12% of the Canadian and American armies are women, yet only 8% and 5% of their respective contributions to UN peacekeeping missions are female (Hicks Stiehm 1999: 42; Beilstein 1995: 3).

2.2 Women in the paramilitary forces

Due to the less formal and more politicised nature of liberation warfare, women have a broader choice of activities in this sphere. Karamé (1999: 19) states that the number of women bearing arms in the paramilitary forces is "surprisingly high compared to that of women within the regular forces". In El Salvador, for instance, 25% of the soldiers of the Faribundi Martí National Liberation Front were women. In Nicaragua around 30% of the Sandinista National Liberation Front soldiers and leaders were women. In Africa, too, there is substantial evidence that women fought alongside men to overthrow oppressive regimes in Angola, Liberia, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and South Africa. It is estimated that in Zimbabwe women comprised between 25% and 30% of the guerrilla fighters of the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army by 1977. Eritrea is another case in point: 13% of the fighters and 30% of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front were women (Karamé 1999: 19-20; Skjelsbæk & Smith 2001: 7).

In order fully to appreciate the complexity of the relationship between women and so-called low intensity conflict one needs to examine the peculiar relationship between feminism and nationalism. This, as Tessler & Warriner (1997: 255) point out, is highly contextual, because feminist and nationalist goals can be mutually reinforcing, men and women accepting that improving women's position in society forms part of the nationalist drive towards reform. On the other hand, the nationalist project is authoritarian and may seek to maintain the patriarchal *status quo*, thus relegating women to the margins of citizenship by effectively obscuring the class, race, gender, regional, ethnic and other differences within the state. Women's active participation in war and war-related work may be overlooked because gender stereotypes are often remobilised in the post-conflict period.

Likewise, women are usually given their rightful place in guerrilla movements only to be sidelined once the revolutionary organisation comes to power. Kandiyoti (1991: 432-3) describes women's complex and paradoxical role in post-colonial societies as follows:

On the one hand, nationalist movements invite women to participate more fully in collective life by interpellating them as 'national' actors: mothers, educators, workers and even fighters. On the other hand, they reaffirm the boundaries of culturally acceptable feminine conduct and exert pressure on women to articulate their gender interests within the terms of reference set by nationalist discourse.

Both women's roles, on the battlefield and the home front, are fraught with ambiguities, many of which are exacerbated by the manipulation of empirical evidence to obscure deep-seated gender stereotypes. Contextualised analyses, taking account of identity in difference, are therefore needed. In the next section the emphasis shifts from the empirical to the theoretical or ideological level, where various feminist perspectives on militarism compete, often with mystifying results.

3. Gender, militarism and patriarchy

Militarism poses a particular challenge to feminist analysts, because it has wide-ranging effects on various groups and consequently evokes a multiplicity of explanations (Steans 1998: 112; Cock 1992: 15). The concept of militarism connotes more than merely the military as a social institution. Militarism is an ideology that prioritises war, thereby serving to legitimise state violence. This involves the subordination of civil society to military values, with militaristic attitudes and social practices being viewed as normal and desirable social activities. Steans (1998: 113) defines militarism as "a social process which involves the mobilization for war through the penetration of the military, its power and influence, into more and more social arenas". Since militarisation is not exclusively linked to war, it can also exist during peacetime. Then all social institutions (eg the family, education, and motherhood) run the risk of becoming imbued with military values.

Non-feminist analyses of militarism ascribe this development either to capitalism or to the inherent nature of the state. A feminist

analysis transcends such explanations and argues that patriarchy lies at the root of militaristic tendencies. In other words, "gender" — the social construction of masculinity and femininity — is the key factor in the construction and perpetuation of militarism. Masculinity or manliness is the link that binds the military and industry in such a way that the hegemony of the military industrial complex is maintained, for example by the perception that work in an armaments factory is "men's work" (Steans 1998: 114). Ironically, women are effectively excluded from the military industrial complex, yet conveniently co-opted to serve the interests of the male state and its male warriors. Militarism and sexism are mutually dependant — in the words of Steans (1998: 116),

the 'ideal soldier' and the 'ideal wife and mother' both take orders unquestioningly from men who have power and status and both are expected to sacrifice themselves for those more important.

3.1 A pluralism of contending feminist perspectives regarding the military

As mentioned in the introduction, the feminist perspective on the military is varied and often contradictory. This results from the ideological pluralism found in feminism. Such variety is also evident in other postmodern theories such as critical theory and constructivism. There are great differences between the various post-positivist theories, but what unites them is their rejection of positivist assumptions, not necessarily a common alternative. The entry of feminism into the academy during the 1970s was significant in a historical sense, but also resulted in the establishment of an abstracted feminism, which is generally understood as a theoretical-academic discipline. The feminist project is often criticised for its preoccupation with patriarchy and is perceived as elitist and colonising — becoming a "master" narrative presenting closure where open-endedness or fractious holism, in a postmodern sense, would be far more appropriate.

The complex and varied character of feminism poses analytical problems, since it elevates gender to the status of the solitary unit of analysis. While it is true that gender is a significant social construction which in many ways determines women's and men's experiences, it is not the only social relation — race and class should not

be overlooked. The multitude of feminist perspectives reflect deep politico-ideological divisions but can be broadly classified according to theories of inequality, oppression and difference.

3.1.1 Theories of gender inequality

Theories of gender inequality emphasise the fact that men and women are unequal in terms of the allocation of resources such as power and the way in which society is organised. Consequently, women have fewer opportunities than men to satisfy their needs. Liberal feminism stands for equality between men and women in terms of rights, opportunities and representation in politics, work and all areas of social life. This approach is commonly known as the “add women and stir” version of feminism (Smith 1998: 174). These feminists see the elimination of discriminatory laws as the key to changing sexist attitudes. In terms of their stance on the military, liberal feminists plead for gender equity in the armed forces (and particularly in combat). They contend that women’s exclusion from war is linked to their exclusion from political and economic affairs. It is argued that the existence of a large number of female soldiers would suffice to erode the sexism of the armed forces (Nathan 1994: 145-6). This position is essentially not anti-militarist and seeks to change the system from within. Liberal feminists stand firm in denying the biological and sociological linkages between women and peace.

3.1.2 Theories of gender oppression

Power is the lens through which theories of gender oppression view society. According to this perspective, the lack of access to power is not merely an accidental consequence of difference and inequality but rather premeditated and deliberate. Such a power relationship between men and women is maintained through patriarchy (Ritzer 1992: 470). Any form of collaboration with the minions of patriarchy — including the military establishment — is vehemently opposed. This perspective maintains that women soldiers would inevitably be obliged to conform to male values and practices (Nathan 1994: 146). Integrating women into the military would increase the militarisation of society as a whole and in effect undermine the feminist tradi-

tion of non-violence by negating the work of peace movements and women's movements (Steans 1998: 116).

This perspective comprises an ambiguous mixture of radical, socialist, non-Western and postmodern strands of feminism. For radical feminists patriarchy is also the focal point of wrath, but they extend the analysis by linking it to the social practice of violence against women (Ritzer 1992: 474; McKay 1994: 346-7). Radical feminists seek fundamental social transformation rather than equity. Socialist feminism attempts to blend Marxist and radical critiques of women's inequality and oppression in order to produce a comprehensive explanation of female oppression as emanating, for instance, from the patriarchal capitalist system. Post-modern feminists contend that ignoring the multiplicity of women's experiences across racial, class and cultural lines runs the risk of essentialising the meaning of woman, thus reproducing modernist, hierarchical and totalising discourses similar to patriarchy (Tickner 1992: 15, 16). After all, "the experience of 'women' is ontologically fractured and complex because we do not all share one single and unseamed material reality" (Stanley & Wise 1990: 22).

3.1.3 Theories of gender difference

The school of thought within feminism which supports theories of gender difference — the so-called "special qualities" thesis — also has to contend with ambiguity (and controversy) in respect of its varied positions on the military. In this way feminism contributes to the mystification of the role of women in the military. Ironically, too, such essentialist thinking has played into the hands of men who wish to exclude women from the armed forces on the grounds of their biological (in)capacity. Acknowledging gender differences does not necessarily lead to the perception of inability, but rather to an awareness of different functions and roles in the military.

More than 200 years ago, in 1792, Mary Wollstonecraft argued that while women should have equal rights they did not have an equal right to bear arms. In her view, women's role as mothers exempted them from the bearing of arms. Similarly, in *Women and Labour* (1911), Olive Schreiner argued that pacifism is instinctual in women and they value human life differently from (Cock 1992: 15, 17). The propo-

nents of gender difference emphasise that such differences may be explained by:

- biological factors (eg hormones and women's naturally caring and nurturing instincts);
- institutional factors, meaning that a woman's distinct role as mother, wife and homemaker leads to division in other spheres; and
- socio-psychological factors such as the effect of socialisation on the acceptance and internalisation of gender roles (Ritzer 1992: 459-61).

Paradoxically, there are some anti-militarist feminists who would support women's inclusion in the military because they believe women's feminine characteristics might contribute both towards altering the nature of defence forces and war and to giving women a stake in the formulation of security policy.¹¹ Others would argue that women's pacifist and nurturing "nature" makes them unsuited to warfare.¹²

Invariably one has to ask whether there are experiences particular to women as a group which may be used in enhancing our understanding of a redefined security concept? Placing the special qualities thesis in the context of international politics, one can argue that women's role as a caregiver in society is of particular relevance to global security, as their tolerant nature not only makes them ideal peace-makers but can also help men dispense with their aggressive approach to the solving of conflict resolution. Standpoint feminism claims that the female version of reality has been ignored and that the world has been dominated by a male account of reality and knowledge. Standpoint feminists argue that women are essentially different from men and that their contribution to world politics is thus

11 See for instance Judith Hicks Stiehm's (1988: 104) view: "It [the military] would not suddenly be infused with either womanly or feminist values, but it would cease being an all-male institution, and in doing so it would lose some coercive power which such institutions hold over men."

12 Most contemporary feminist views regarding gender difference rely on women's reproductive capacity as the fundamental explanation for women's being less aggressive than men. Peacefulness and motherhood are therefore intrinsically linked (Cock 1992: 16).

also different. Women have a distinctive and superior view of the world — distinctive because their perspective is shaped by experiences which are different from those of men, and superior (more valid and objective) since the world view of the oppressed is not blinded by existing institutions and power relations (Brown 1997: 241).

The intermingling of biological and sociological gender differences necessarily invites criticism. The special qualities theory perpetuates dangerous stereotypes and can rightly be typified as essentialist, reductionist, counterproductive and self-defeating for the feminist project. It reduces women to one-dimensional universalistic characters. Historical evidence on how German women made a vital contribution to the Nazi cause by means of their silence (Cock 1992: 18) indicates that being female does not necessarily protect one from being a protagonist of horror. Chapkis (1988: 108) does not mince words:

As long as women continue to insist on this narrowly gendered image of womanhood, we will not only fail to effectively challenge the ideology on which current military practice is based, but we will leave ourselves open to direct use by the military to pick up the bloody pieces in time of war.

The above-mentioned thesis has also been criticised in terms of the lack of empirical evidence of significant sex-linked differences regarding attitudes towards conflict. Two studies in this regard deserve mention. Wilcox *et al* (1996) conducted a cross-national survey of attitudes towards the Gulf War, in 11 large cities in developed as well as developing countries. The second survey was conducted by Tessler & Warriner (1997) on the attitudes of four Middle Eastern states regarding the Arab-Israeli conflict. The study of the Gulf War found only modest gender differences in the interpretation of events. The Arab-Israeli study showed no significant differences in the views of men and women and therefore concluded that there is no evidence that women are more inclined towards peaceful methods of conflict resolution.

In sum, while many feminists have been cautious about ascribing specific values exclusively to men or to women, they have nevertheless maintained that the values of nurturing and caring are at least symbolically associated with women. No conclusive evidence exists to suggest that men are essentially aggressive and women naturally

peaceful. Nevertheless, serious contemplation of these debates can offer a vantage-point from which traditionally Western, statist narratives of security may be challenged. It is important to recognise that all these arguments hold an element of truth, and that our biological make-up and our socially and culturally constructed roles determine our insecurities. Gender, in isolation, is an insufficient analytical tool. Patriarchy as the root cause of all evil therefore presents an oversimplistic view of the problem. An analysis of peace and security issues requires a multi-faceted perspective — a holism, even though it may remain at best “fractious”.

The dilemma for feminists is to find creative ways of adopting an aggressive stance against militarism while retaining the values of care and responsibility. Feminists often focus on combat in order to illustrate the connection between militarism and masculinity.

3.2 Combat as the primary tool in fostering the nexus between masculinity and militarism

Despite their multiple and often conflicting voices, feminists play an important role in unmasking the true nature of the military. Consistent with their critique of the gendered state, they expose the masculinist and sexist underpinnings of the military as an institution of the state. This enables us to see why the traditional view of national security and the dominance of the “security forces” as the sole agent for the protection of the “national interest” has prevailed. Comprehensive security remains elusive as long as male warriors or citizens continue to protect visible male interests. This state of affairs leads to a number of anomalies. In the first place, women’s increased involvement in combat roles has implications for the meaning of the concept of citizenship. Also, images of women in combat are very varied and defy clear definition. Roach Pierson (Grant 1992: 93) concludes that there is no consistent women’s response to the trials of war and revolution. Combat, as an essential tool in the maintenance of the link between patriarchy and masculinity, therefore contributes towards increasing the ambiguity of the relationship between women and war.

Gender bias is evident not only in general arguments concerning women and the military, but also in views on women in combat. In the USA women’s inclusion in the military has had some effect in

eroding gender roles. However, some military men have persistently argued against women's inclusion on the basis of factors such as that women's combat readiness is hampered by their biological limitations in terms of upper body and leg strength and endurance, as well as the cohesion of the combat unit. While some of the biological evidence may be hard to dispute, psychological comparisons are less convincing. Accounts of women's participation in combat roles indicate that they experience emotions and reactions similar to those of men (Cilliers 1993: 42).

War is built on one of the most basic dualisms, namely "us" versus "them", the enemy. The true nature of war relies heavily on the entrenchment of so-called masculine values. Kopkind (Cock 1992: 17) depicts war as

command rather than participation, obedience over agreement,
hierarchy instead of equality, repression not liberation, uniformity
not diversity, secrecy not candor, propaganda not information.

The language of war abounds with "macho" terms. Enloe (1988) coined the term "rambo-ization" to describe this possibly universalist phenomenon. The enemy is furthermore depicted in feminine terms, as is shown by General Schwartzkopf's description of the plan to destroy the Iraqi military during the Gulf War in terms of a "Hail Mary" strategy (Dalby 1994: 602). The male imagery of "war talk" is further strengthened by the use of metaphors from the world of sport. Competition in sport is often depicted as a form of combat. Pictures of women armed with guns when a country is at war are aimed at recruiting men. Hicks Stiehm also asserts that "military trainers resort to manipulation of men's anxiety about their sexual identity in order to increase soldiers' willingness to fight" (Tickner 1992: 40). To be called a "girl" in training is the worst possible insult.

Combat is an essential component of the patriarchal military system and serves as the ultimate test of masculinity. As long as women are excluded from combat roles, men's role as protectors (and citizens) is safe, thereby safeguarding the system of patriarchy. But to overemphasise women's inclusion in the military, or to argue that women's first-class citizenship depends on equality in the military, is dangerous. In an era in which armed forces across the globe are beginning to refocus their mission in less purely military terms, such

an emphasis runs the risk of elevating the military to its former Cold War glory.

In conclusion, with regard to the relationship between women, war, militarism and patriarchy there is no single definitive feminist perspective. Enloe states that the very breadth and depth of the topic makes it difficult to develop an unambiguously feminist analysis of militarism (Steans 1998: 117). Yet ambiguity does not preclude an understanding of the connections between gender, patriarchy and militarism. What needs to be noted is that gender is not the single most important determinant of militarism, but certainly is integral to its operation.

Central to the understanding of the relationship between women and war is the fact that feminists conceptualise violence holistically. This will be the subject of the final section of this study.

4. Gender violence: an alternative feminist conceptualisation

Thus far, the tension between women and war and the extent of women's collusion with war have been highlighted. Together, the ambiguities relating to women's security in an era of globalisation, the multiple perspectives on women in the military, the starkly gendered dichotomies of "us versus them" in combat, and the manifold personalities of women in war make up a fractious or imperfect holism. The ontological reality is fractured but remains intact amid tension, disagreement and multiplicity. This is explained by the fact that the feminist perspective on security is held together by a widely shared view on gender violence and its theoretical and practical consequences for women and society in general. For feminists, to ignore the gendered nature of violence would be to adopt the very patriarchal perspective they are struggling to eliminate. The dynamics of power inequality and the insecurity that it generates cannot be negated when studying violence through the lens of gender. Various overlapping forms of violence, whether direct, indirect, repressive, or alienating, have an all-pervasive influence on the security of women.¹³

13 Jamil Salmi's (1993: 22-3) typology of violence can be used to illustrate the pervasiveness of violence against women.

In December 1993, the UN General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women. The declaration defines gender violence as:

any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, *whether occurring in public or private life* [my emphasis] [...] Violence against women shall be understood to encompass, but not be limited to, physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family and in the community, including battery, sexual abuse of female children, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence, violence related to exploitation, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women, forced prostitution, and violence against women perpetrated and condoned by the state (Jackson 1997: 2).

This definition quite clearly adopts an inclusive and comprehensive approach to gender violence and recognises that the private domain is also political.

This declaration effectively condemns both family violence and violence perpetrated or condoned by the state. Joachim (1999: 150, 152) cites two events which led to this encouraging development. In the first instance, the demise of the Cold War allowed non-military issues to enter the intellectual fray. As a result, the UN embarked on a series of specialised conferences pertaining, among others, to environment and development, human rights and population and development. In the second place, the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna (1993) with its slogan of "Women's rights as human rights" played a significant role in linking gender violence and human rights. Activists succeeded in refuting the argument that since violence against women takes place within the family context, neither the state nor the international community has a responsibility to intervene.

Feminists reconceptualise the narrow concept of military security (the absence of physical threat from a foreign invader or aggressor) to include all forms of violence, particularly those perpetrated against women. This point of view is consistent with their general support of the shift from a traditionally state-centric interpretation of global security to an emphasis on human security. In place of a realist per-

spective, what has taken root is a broadened security concept with state and non-state actors as the objects of security, an expanded agenda of military and non-military threats, and a broad range of security objectives (such as peace, democracy, development, social justice and environmental protection). The human security approach, therefore, involves a fundamental departure from orthodox security analysis, in which the state is the primary referent. Instead, human beings and their complex social and economic relations are given primacy. Power, in other words, is not understood in relational terms (“us” versus “them”) but — in the words of Hannah Arendt — should rather be defined as “the ability to act in concert” (Keohane 1991: 42-4). The main point, therefore, is to understand security in terms of the real-life, everyday experience of human beings (including women) as they are embedded within global structures.

Feminists contend, first, that all forms of violence are fundamentally interrelated, whether inter- or intrastate or domestic. Family violence, for instance, must be seen in the wider context of unequal power relations. As indicated above, arbitrary definitions of what constitutes the “private” are often used to justify female subordination at home (Joachim 1999: 155). Secondly, it is argued that violence is a major consequence of the imbalances created by a male-dominated or gendered society. Patriarchy is therefore also seen as a form of violence. Violence against women is profoundly political, as it emanates from structural imbalances — hence the notion of structural violence. By bringing about an awareness of the correlation between private and public violence, feminism makes a sound contribution to the notion of comprehensive security.

Along with our focus on women’s issues and their bearing on the security of the “whole”, we need to remember that men are also often the victims of direct and indirect violence. But feminists point out that in most cases gender serves to establish a connection between institutional (structural or indirect) and physical (direct) violence. Reardon (1993: 41) convincingly argues that “[a]s institutional violence is a means to maintain privilege and hierarchy, so physical violence is used to demonstrate [that] power”. One needs to comprehend how violence — whether state-sanctioned or “informal” — is related to a socio-cultural emphasis on masculinity. This is a first step

towards understanding what kind of social structures are required to foster peaceful resolution of conflict. This means, in practice, that one has to focus attention on the private domain of personal relations and how the resolution of conflict at this level could work towards ending militarism at all other levels. Feminists would therefore assert that until the private/public dualism has been broken down and the personal is recognised as political, no truly inclusive human security can be built. Militarism and war need to be viewed as processes achieved and not as events, in order to develop an in-depth understanding of the connections between women, war and militarism.

As a global phenomenon gender violence remains a contentious and complex issue, with progress often impeded by feminists themselves. It is not yet clear whether gender violence is declining, particularly because the decision to implement global agreements at a national level remains firmly in the hands of individual states. Many developing countries continue to pay lip-service to international conventions and maintain a dual (formal and informal) legal system in order to perpetuate traditional cultural practices. Nevertheless, states are no longer able to argue that gender violence is “beyond their jurisdiction”. Women’s rights are, in theory, firmly entrenched in the body of human rights.

5. Concluding remarks

This study has endeavoured to depict the complex relationship between women and war, arguing that the connection is neither straightforward nor without ambivalence.

Ambiguities abound concerning women’s security in the context of globalisation. Scholars, policy-makers and practitioners disagree on the nature and effects of globalisation, and often ignore the fact that globalisation is both an external and an internal process of global and national transformation. Feminists, however, are unanimous in their view that the introduction of gender into the equation is a prerequisite for exposing the gendered or patriarchal underpinnings of the global labour market — the primary cause of women’s economic insecurity.

However, the relative consensus among feminists regarding this context does not extend to all other areas of human security. When considering evidence of women's roles in war and peace, one encounters a fractured image. On the one hand, women's complicity in the war effort ranges from being silent partners to being "doers" in combat. On the other hand, women also have a long history of actively resisting war.

Any analysis of the linkage between women and war invariably has to take cognisance of the ideology of militarism and how it works towards entrenching masculine values and attributes at all levels of society. Sadly, the feminist project of unmasking this phenomenon lacks coherence and clarity. Too many opposing "feminisms", some more radical and controversial than others, mystify the analysis, thus weakening the feminist contribution to comprehensive human security.

Nevertheless, the fractious holism fostered as a result of the tug-of-war between contending perspectives and empirical evidence which often does not accurately depict the reality of the situation, remains intact. Institutional or structural violence is conceptually linked to physical violence by means of the introduction of gender as a category of analysis. In this way the private and the public spheres are brought together under one rubric, namely the political. It is in this area that the feminist perspective on human security is making a sound contribution to a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between women and war.

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