

Is Peace a Smiling Woman? Femininities and Masculinities in Conflict and Peace Coverage

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Abstract

The chapter studies how concepts of gender, war and peace are understood and applied in the coverage of international strategies for conflict and peace in examples from Norwegian newspapers. The theoretical backdrop is found in discussions on traditional and more recent forms of feminism and in some of their inherent contradictions.

Keywords:

gender roles, conflict and peace reporting, feminism studies, Norwegian newspapers

This chapter aspires to contribute to the growing body of academic work in the field of gender perspectives within international relations and conflict studies. Using examples from a selection of four Norwegian newspapers in their paper versions – *Aftenposten*, *Bergens Tidende*, *Dagsavisen* and *Klassekampen* – it looks at how gender is portrayed in peace-building efforts in relation to wars around the world. Crucial questions are connected to how concepts of gender, war and peace are understood and applied in the coverage of international strategies for conflict and for peace. The theoretical backdrop is found in discussions on feminism and in some of their inherent contradictions. The chapter sets out to combine different perspectives to engage with questions of how to conceptualise the multiple and simultaneous roles of gender – femininities and masculinities – in reporting conflict and peace initiatives; of the challenges and opportunities in the press's equations between gender roles and war and peace; and of which journalistic approaches have the potential for developing encompassing representations of gender and transformation towards sustainable peaceful solutions to conflict.

The methodology is based on a content analysis of a selection of the four above-mentioned newspapers from 1 January 2013 to 30 September 2015. A quantitative analysis will be carried out in order to find some trends related to gender and journalistic coverage of war and peace building, looking into how much coverage is given to male and to female participation. Using the findings from the quantitative analysis as a backdrop, a qualitative analysis of the news stories will be undertaken, to situate some of the articles within a combination of some key feminism perspectives.

The approach is explorative and the articles serve primarily as illustrations and examples of different approaches to gender, war and peace. To provide a broader context for the discussion, the chapter also includes input from an interview with the Ugandan award-winning journalist Barbara Among, who has covered war and conflicts extensively in her own country. These quotes are considered important as contextual information to supplement and extend the knowledge from the analysis of the newspapers, as both a way of including the voice of an experienced reporter and of getting perspectives on reporting conflict and gender which don't necessarily originate from the northern hemisphere. A leading hypothesis for the chapter is that different perspectives on gender and peace processes find resonance within different scholarly traditions of feminism. The chapter therefore starts with an introductory presentation of some predominant understandings of feminism.

Feminism approaches

Feminism has been described as one of the most powerful struggles for social justice in the world (hooks 2000). There are, today, many different variants of feminism associated with a variety of philosophical and political outlooks (see, for example, Rosser 2005). This chapter discusses some important approaches and their inherent dilemmas. It is inspired by intersectionality and by exploring the intersections between gender and geographic/cultural belonging, and by conflict and peace. The starting point for the discussions is the distinction between sex and gender (the former to a large degree a 'natural' categorisation, the latter primarily social) as, for instance, proposed by Zillah Eisenstein (1999: 36-41), so that although the biological specificities of male and female bodies may be asserted in all their multiple forms, it is the notions of gender and gender differences that will be discussed here.

Historically, equality feminism focused on the basic similarities between men and women, or, rather that individual differences are larger within the different gender groups than between them. Inspired by thinkers such as Simone de Beauvoir (1949-2002), equality feminists argued that whereas women and men have basic biological differences of anatomy and frame, on a psychological level the use of rationality and reason is androgynous. For 'equality feminists', men and women are equal in terms of their ability to reason, achieve goals and prosper in both work and domestic life.

‘Difference feminism’, on the other hand stressed the inherent differences between men and women, and rejected the more androgynous view of human nature as emphasised in equality feminism. Difference feminists would argue that there are fundamental, biological differences between men and women, and that women have particular nurturing virtues such as empathy, patience and concern and are inherently more kind, gentle and peaceful (see, for example, Gilligan 1982).

More recently, scholars such as Nancy Fraser (2014) and Andi Zeisler (2016) have shown how gender equality may also allow for multiple conflicting interpretations. In particular, Fraser’s critical approach to liberal feminism shows how the movement for women’s rights and liberation has increasingly become closely intertwined with what she sees as neoliberal strategies for reshaping society in the image of the marketplace (2014). The neoliberal project seeks to undo past collective gains, which limited labour exploitation and maintained public goods, instead dividing people into vendors and consumers. In such a project, feminism would be expressed individualistically, and the focus on social solidarity is distorted. In the words of Zeisler (2016), “the revolution has become privatised” and feminists today are all about the right to make individual choices – and are totally estranged from the original objectives of feminism, which meant collective action to change entire systems. Several scholars agree that feminists’ objectives have been ‘co-opted’ by other agendas, as gender is used as a technocratic tool and is thus stripped of its original critical content (Squires 2005; Whitworth 2004). Fraser (2014) and Zeisler (2016) show how gender concepts can easily be co-opted and combined with hegemonic discourses (including hegemonic war rhetoric) and used in ways not envisaged by those who first expressed them. Berit von der Lippe and Kirsti Stuvøy (2013) clarify, for instance, how the demand for female representation in international peace negotiations often lacks reflection on global power structures and how good intentions for gender equality can easily be co-opted into justification for war. The liberal feminism approach is criticised by the postcolonial feminists as well, as they show how what they label ‘imperialist feminism’ was born in the nineteenth century in the context of European colonialism. It was based on the appropriation of women’s rights in the service of empire, and has taken new forms and presented new agents of imperialist feminism in the last years (Kumar 2014). Deepa Kumar shows how the immediate context for a renaissance of imperialist feminism in the US is the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan. Borrowing a trope from Britain in India and Egypt, and France in Algeria, the US

argued that it was going to ‘liberate Afghan women’. Imperialism became even more interconnected with empire in the Obama era, Kumar argues and shows how *Amnesty*, through the voices of powerful women, such as Madeline Albright, provided imperialist feminist justifications for war (2014). From this perspective, feminism has been accused of being a largely Western product with a tendency to forget the need to focus on multiple forms of oppression, race and gender in particular (Anzaldúa 1990; hooks 2000). Postcolonial feminism has argued that by using the term ‘woman’ as a universal group, women are defined only by their gender and not by social class, ethnicity or sexual preference (hooks 2000; Narayan 1997). As several postcolonial feminists have argued, a historical weakness of liberal/imperialist feminism in the West has been its racist, patronising attitude towards women of colour who have been seen less as allies and agents and more as victims in need of rescue.

Peace journalism

Peace journalism stems from the work of Johan Galtung (2002) and seeks to counter the established journalistic practices of war journalism. Jake Lynch and Annabel McGoldrick describe peace journalism as the process in which journalists make choices about what to report and how to report it, which “create opportunities for society at large to consider and to value the non-violent, developmental responses to conflict” (Lynch & McGoldrick 2005: 5). Peace journalism is supposed to be an alternative journalistic programme where the idea is “to escape from the war propaganda trap of symbolically constructing armed conflicts as polarised, black and white, zero-sum games” (Nohrstedt & Ottosen 2008: 13). Peace journalism, as opposed to the established practices of war journalism, demands the contextualisation of a conflict. It suggests that the reporter should refrain from mere event coverage of violence and should delve deep into the root causes to find possible peaceful long-term resolutions. An important task within the peace journalism model is to report in relation to the context and historical issues in the conflict area, identifying “its history, recent causes and internal composition” (Francis, in Lynch 2007: 8). This indeed echoes much of the postcolonial feminist writing, which asks us to be aware of the tension between the universality of rights and the need not to erase the socioeconomic and political context of the living realities of women and men around the world.

A central argument in this chapter is that it is possible to connect perspectives from the school of postcolonial feminism to the theoretical field of ‘peace journalism’, as

both perspectives are concerned with getting more voices and perspectives heard. As power structures based on gender, race, ethnicity, political orientation, empire, class and the like do not function independently of each another but must be understood together, there is a need – on one hand – to embed gender processes into specific historical, cultural and economic/political contexts, without – on the other hand – exaggerating the emphasis on ‘voice’, ‘agency’ or ‘location’ in such a manner that it reduces patriarchy merely to questions of culture and tradition. This chapter, hence, proposes to bring some of the differences and paradoxes of feminist epistemologies into the reading of the newspaper texts, in order, hopefully, to further develop the discussions about gender, peace and conflict. Before taking that on, however, we will have a closer look into the journalistic material that we are to discuss.

Journalism a cultural prerequisite for social change

– selecting Norwegian newspapers

Journalism may influence the way a society thinks about the world, the way each culture perceives itself and its surroundings, and the way people relate to one another and to society at large. Journalism plays a part in shaping the way in which core societal concepts such as ‘men’ and ‘women’ are understood and used. Journalism therefore functions as a cultural prerequisite for societal change at large, and for the dissemination and communication of ideas of gender as well as of conflict and peace. Studies show how the representation of gender in news is often associated with relations of domination and subordination: news reports of violence of gender tend to represent women as victims – associated with their lack of power – or, on the contrary, as those responsible for the violence of which they are victims. Often, aggressors are not part of news reports at all. However, journalism and the professional orientations of journalists, the conditions and limitations under which they operate, may vary from one part of the world to another as the Worlds of Journalism study indicates (<http://www.worldsofjournalism.org/>).

In Daniel Hallin’s and Paolo Mancini’s (2004) study of European media systems, Norway is labelled ‘democratic corporatist’, characterised by “a high level of political parallelism” and “journalistic professionalisation” (Hallin & Mancini 2004: 145). The four newspapers analysed here have been selected on the basis of their geographical location and readership profile – not so much for a comparative perspective as for a broad selection of articles to study in light of the present focus of research.

Aftenposten is Norway's largest newspaper, based in Oslo and owned by Media Norge and Schibsted, and so is *Bergens Tidende*, Norway's largest newspaper outside Oslo. *Klassekampen*, published in Oslo, styles itself as "the daily left-wing newspaper" and is published in Oslo, *Dagsavisen* is also published in Oslo: it was the former organ of the Norwegian Labour Party and is now fully independent although the relationship between the political parties and the media remains interesting in Norway (see Ottosen et al. 2013).

Selecting relevant articles

As Roy Krøvel (2016) shows, over the last twenty-five years Norway has been engaged in various peace processes around the world, normally in the role of a 'facilitator' or 'neutral mediator'. As a result, Norwegian foreign diplomacy has been credited with a number of international successes and Norwegian media have not remained unaffected by these activities. The role of the Norwegian "regime of goodness" (Tvedt 2006) and the disputes around the concept, is not in particular the focus of this chapter, but nevertheless constitutes part of a broader context for the selected articles. An interesting aspect when selecting key words for choosing relevant articles in the newspapers, is the use of the concepts 'war' and 'peace' in Norwegian political discourse. Norwegian politicians have been reluctant to label Norway's participation, for instance in NATO's military operation in Libya, a war, even though Norway participated actively in the bombing, and preferred to present 'humanitarian' arguments as justifications for the intervention (see Ottosen et al. 2013). Hence, the differences between 'peace actions' and 'war actions' may be difficult to grasp when based on key words for selecting newspaper articles. As a result, a list of similar key words covering both war and peace discourses was used as a basis for selecting the articles. The aim of the study is not to present an overview of all such articles published during the selected period, but, rather, to provide a sound basis for reflection on how gender is portrayed in Norwegian newspapers in relation to war and in peace-building efforts around the world.

A few quantitative findings

For the coverage of war and peace building, it turns out that adding the keyword "man" or 'men' results in significantly more articles than adding 'woman' or 'women'. For example, during the period in focus, 'peace process' plus

'woman/women' received twelve hits in the selected four newspapers, whereas 'peace process' plus 'man/men' received eighteen hits. 'Bombing' plus 'man/men' received 103 hits and 'bombing' plus 'woman/women' received 74 hits. 'Peace' plus 'man/men' received 1483 hits and 'peace' plus 'woman/women' received 992. When a broad keyword such as 'peace' or 'war' is used, there are, of course, an important number of articles which are not directly relevant for the focus of this research project (for instance, articles about sport and so on). Some 150 articles, explicitly relating to processes of war and peace, were selected, and from this material some articles and opinion pieces will be further discussed below.

The fact that 'man' and 'men' were explicitly mentioned in more articles than 'woman' and 'women' in combination with the entire list of keywords, echoes the findings of Eide and Orgeret (GMMP 2010 and 2015) that women appear in approximately one-third of the news stories in Norwegian media and men in two-thirds. Internationally, women's visibility in the news media is even smaller – only around one-quarter of those heard, spoken of or read about in the news are women (GMMP 2010 and 2015). For expert sources, the gap is even more prominent: around 80 per cent are men and 20 per cent women, globally and in Norway.

When looking more closely into the articles it becomes clear that when the physical sex of the actors of the stories is not explicitly stated, the implied norm is that 'people' are male. Examples are: 'insurgents', 'militarists', 'commandants', 'commanders', 'attackers', 'warriors' and so on. The norm is male, if women are involved, the prefix 'female' or 'women' seems necessary. Another distinct finding is that gender is not (or is rarely) discussed as an issue in the majority of news stories on conflict, war and peace processes, where men are dominant actors. When the focus is on women, however, the articles are, in general, much more gender aware. Most of the articles focused on women will also be explicitly concerned about gender roles, or on what is considered typically or untypically feminine. The article 'Rather war than peace' (Bergens Tidende 10 April 2013) is a typical example of an article which presents a totally male focus in a 'normalised' way. Accompanying the lengthy article (with numerous male sources), is an image of a Kurdish woman taking care of flowers on one of the graves of the 5000 Kurds killed in gas attacks in Halabja in Northern Iraq in 1988. The sole woman represents the soft, caring and concerned side of society – a woman without a name.

Gender is a most interesting parameter for inclusion in discussions of war and

conflict situations. It is well-documented that women and children suffer terribly in war. The dangers of war go far beyond the violence of combat. In situations of armed conflict, women suffer some of the greatest health and social inequities in the world. Such perspectives, including how women in war-torn societies face sexual violence, sometimes applied systematically to achieve military or political objectives, are quite well covered in the newspapers analysed.

Qualitative analysis –

reading the newspaper stories with a combination of feminist approaches

Below, I suggest discussing some of the newspaper articles in light of some of the main feminist approaches. In some perspectives the power relation between the genders receives the most attention; in others the global power relationships are predominant. The main point here is to show some tendencies and paradoxes concerning gender and conflict reporting, rather than to categorise all newspaper articles strictly. Newspaper stories combining aspects of liberal feminism with difference feminism. In the selected newspapers, substantial attention is given to how women and children suffer the most in times of crisis and war. South Sudan is described as one of the world's most dangerous places for women (*Aftenposten* 19 May 2014). A number of articles focus on how women and girls in conflict areas are also victims of extended gender violence and rape (for example, *Bergens Tidende* 22 July 2013, *A Magasinet* 30.5.2014, *Dagsavisen* 18.5.2015, *Klassekampen* 24 July 2015). In some of these articles, the women are depicted as powerless sufferers and there is an implicit suggestion (and sometimes even an explicit statement) that the women need help from (masculine) forces outside their own society – for instance against Boko Haram or ISIL.

Although not very frequent, and indirectly rather than directly, there are some articles in the selected material which echo Abu-Lughod's description of how the imperial discourse in its present-day form is often based on the construction of a misogynistic "Muslim world" that must be civilised by a liberal enlightened West. Studies of imperialist feminism have repeatedly pointed out that the Orientalist construction of Islam as barbaric and misogynist is part of pro-war propaganda, a process entitled the 'saving Muslim women' trap (Abu-Lughod 2013).

Newspaper stories combining aspects of liberal feminism with equality feminism

Significant scholarly focus has been given to the problematic of feminist aims taken up and co-opted in ways that absorb the meanings of the original concepts to fit them into the prevailing political priorities (for example, Lippe 2012; Fraser 2014; Kumar 2014). We recognise this way of argumentation in the manner that gender equality in the Norwegian army is used as a rhetorical tool to legitimise actions of war. This may be labelled ‘Western cultural essentialism’ in the words of Alison Jaggar (2005: 50) or a ‘feminist war rhetoric’, in the words of Berit von der Lippe (2012: 32), as it combines a gender equality approach (for Western women) with an imperialist approach that sees cultures as internally homogenous and sees ‘the West’ as free and fair, and ‘the South’ as the opposite. That the action to include more women in Norwegian army is seen as gender equality, is stressed by Brigadier Frode Kristoffersen in an interview (*Aftenposten* 24 August 2015); further implications of participation in war is, however, not mentioned, and the article leaves the impression of war journalism rather than of peace journalism. This may also be seen as an example of what Nancy Fraser (2014) describes as the co-option process, the co-opted concept of gender equality is not ejected, but an additional implicit war rhetoric has been introduced and this rhetoric nurtures the feminist concept in a totally different manner from the way it was first formulated. As such, co-option is a useful means of containing and maintaining large areas of silences. It is a practice that both absorbs and neutralises the meaning of the original concept of equality. Pierre Bourdieu’s understanding of the concept ‘doxa’ is relevant here. According to Bourdieu (1984), doxa indicates “thoughts which are thought through”. Bourdieu’s point is that in any society there are topics never questioned because someone wants to present ‘something’ – in many cases the most important aspects of, and control of, societal structures – as something given and natural. Liberal feminist perspectives have routinely viewed women’s participation in the military as positive. Typical of this perspective in the articles is that they often talk about peace making instead of violence or war, and in some cases they even use gender equality to mobilise support for war. This is what Leila Ahmed (1992) has called ‘colonial feminism’. It may combine the idea of the liberation of Norwegian women, combined with the protection (or victimisation) of oriental women – for instance in the Middle East. An interesting genre in the selection of articles, is the portrait interview with persons who play an important role in processes connected to conflict, war and

peace internationally. In the selected newspaper articles most of these persons are Norwegians. In the interview with Lindis Hurum of Doctors without Borders (*Aftenposten* 9 September 2015), gender is not the main issue; the interview is mostly about Hurum's remarkable experiences working in West Africa during the Ebola crisis, and about her engagement in humanitarian issues. Only in the introduction to the article is it stated that Hurum received a prize for being "the most courageous woman of the year" in 2014. Apparently it is Hurum herself who recounts that "many ask me whether it is because I don't have a husband and children that I live this life. Perhaps it is the other way around." If there was a question that initiated this answer, it is not reflected in the article.

From the analysis of the newspapers, it is clear that women have to 'defend' their choice if they are single or without children more frequently than men. Women in important positions are also asked to justify their choices if they do have a family and still travel to work in conflict zones. "I feel I have sacrificed a lot in relation to family and friends, at the same time I am most grateful for the life I have lived and the jobs I have had," says Elisabeth Rasmusson to *Aftenposten* when she is elected "the most important Norwegian internationally" (11 April 2014). Rasmusson is UN's World Food Programme's assistant executive director in Rome. The article emphasises that she is married without children. Studies of the portrayal of gender in news show that there is a four times higher probability that a woman's family status is mentioned than that of a man (GMMP 2010, 2015).

In the portrait interviews, gender equality is often equated with Norway as a Western liberal democracy, and the agency of foreign women is manifestly absent. Many of the articles, which fit into the combination of liberal feminism and equality feminism, are based on an implicit presumption that the women's movement in Norway successfully achieved its goals long ago and that the fight for equal gender rights belongs to the past. Here, gender concepts are not just neutralised or absorbed, but may in fact also work against mobilisation for real changes. It is difficult to mobilise for equal rights if there is consensus that they are already there. However, several recent studies show that even in Norway there is still a long way to go to obtain gender equality. Even though the women portrayed represent (Norwegian) gender equality, in several cases we see signs of this being a normative contradiction in terms; what is different is portrayed as normal, whereas the fact that the cases do not represent the norm is exactly what legitimates the story's journalistic angle (see, for example, Kjos

Fonn et al. 2012). An example of this in the analysed newspaper material may be Major General Kristin Lund, the first female leader of the UN peace-keeping forces (UNFICYP). Lund is interviewed twice, in two different newspapers, during the period of analysis (*Dagsavisen* 9 August 2014 and *Aftenposten* 16 May 2015). In terms of gender representation the two interviews are fundamentally different, and it is interesting that both reporters are female. The *Aftenposten* story includes interviews with both the special advisor of the secretary-general on Cyprus, Espen Barth Eide, and Major General Kristin Lund. There is nothing in this story to stress that the two important UN persons are of different genders. Barth Eide is portrayed as a caring person paying a lot of attention to little details, such as arranging “silver-coloured drinking cups” in preparation for a peace dinner between the Greek Cypriots and the Turkish Cypriots whereas the major general takes a more classically masculine (top-down) distance to the ‘feminine’ preoccupation with table decorations, as she oversees from the side.

The *Dagsavisen* interview with Major General Lund (9 August 2014) is radically different. Here, the fact that the leader of the UN peacekeeping forces is a woman, is the leitmotif throughout the interview and stressed in virtually all the reporter’s questions. Among several inquiries which seem to resonate with the historical ‘difference feminism’ way of thinking, Lund is asked about “instances in which men are better leaders than women”, about “being the first woman” in a number of positions in the army, and whether she has “any specific tools she uses when operating in a male-dominated field”. At the same time, the reporter stresses how tough Lund is and always has been. “She was beating up the boys in her class from the very first day at school”, and how “after that several Norwegian men were to feel beaten by Kristin Lund”. Lund herself seems more careful to differentiate biological and cultural gender differences, as she describes how being a woman may be an advantage when operating in highly gender segregated cultures: “When you are a woman, you always reach 100 per cent of the population. This is not always the case for my male colleagues”. It is interesting that the reporter sees the need to include a confirmation from the Norwegian Defence Ministry that Lund was chosen “due to relevant experience, competence and that she performed best during the interviews.” It should be obvious that a UNFICYP leader is appointed for achievement and competence. However, in this interview it is also stressed that the UN secretary general, Ban Ki Moon, stated in Lund’s inauguration speech that, “the best leaders are

often women”. It is difficult to imagine a similar interview with a high ranking male UN leader stressing the need to justify the choice of the candidate. The new UNFICYP leader, however, rejects the reporter’s somewhat essentialist assumptions, that there exist some “specific traits of a female leader”. Instead, Lund emphasises the problematic aspects related to the fact that women in the global South “are often seen as victims, not as a resource”, once again stressing the cultural rather than the biological differences.

That being a (foreign) woman in a culture defined by gender segregation may be an advantage is echoed by many of the female sources in the selected material, such as Afghan human rights activist Horia Mosadiq: “As a female researcher I am privileged: men tell me the stories they never dared to tell to anybody, not even to their wives. In addition, I have access to the women’s Afghan human rights activity (*Klassekampen* 25 March 2015). It is remarkable that from the portraits of women in important positions linked to war, conflict and peace resolutions, there are not many signs of the peaceful, mild and smiling woman. Rather, the findings here resonate with Lippe and Stuvøy’s (2013) assertions that Gayatri Spivak’s catchphrase “white men protecting brown women from brown men” has now become “white women and white men protecting brown women from brown men”. When it comes to obtaining gender equality, women in other cultures are considered to need ‘our’ help – the agency of women in the global South is manifestly absent in the selection of newspaper stories.

Newspaper stories combining postcolonial feminism with difference feminism

In the newspaper articles analysed there are also a few interesting examples of how white women could need some protection from white men. Referring to UN statistics, that every third woman in the world is victim of sexual or other kinds of violence during her lifetime, an article (*Bergens Tidende*, 8 March 2015) stresses that Norway is not able to guarantee women and children a life without violence. In Norway, the newspaper article reminds us, 800 women and children live at secret addresses because of a violent ex-partner. Such articles illustrate that the liberal/imperial paradigm’s simplistic division between (underdeveloped) violent societies in the South and (developed) peaceful societies in the North is not valid. In these articles we find examples of a more nuanced, or even radically different approach from the liberal/imperialist paradigm’s tendency to equate countries in the global South with

violence and the suppression of women's agency. These articles reject the simplistic manner of describing women in the South as being in need of help from (men or women from) the North.

However, in terms of gender the articles found here are more essentialist. Some articles emphasise that, given the opportunity, women will be 'much more hard-working' than their male counterparts. Siri Thorkildsen from the Norwegian NGO, Strømmestiftelsen repeats a common cliché which stresses the inherent differences between men and women: "If you give a dollar to a man, you feed one person. If you give a dollar to a woman you feed an entire family" (*Dagsavisen* 12 August 2015). What is specifically "feminine" is explicitly referred to in several articles, such as in the interview with Michelle Bachelet, then director of UN Women, who states in *Dagsavisen* that "women are more peaceful" (15 October 2014), strongly echoing the difference feminism tradition and using the differences as a spur for change to more equality. Quite a few of the articles belong to this category in that they easily portray women (in both the South and the North) as guided by pacifism and concern for others, and that this is an exclusively feminine attribute. It is within such discourses that the title of this chapter – the question whether 'peace is a smiling woman' – finds its *raison d'être*.

On the other hand, little is said about masculinity in the analysed articles. One of the few voices which does mention and describe masculinity, is that of Torild Skard in an op.ed. in *Klassekampen* (12 January 2015), where she argues that "even if warfare and the army is rendered harmless, the military industry is not an ordinary place of work". Here, Skard is unpacking some of the co-option processes that neutralise the meaning of the original concept of equality to fit into prevailing political priorities about war. This is a good example of peace journalism too, in the way that Skard shows that developments other than the military are possible. At the same time, in her description of the army ("One is to learn violence and how to kill, in contrast to women's upbringing in giving life") she seems situated within a rather essentialist approach to what women and men are. She goes on to say that it is argued that the army gets "better" with more women, but that it will take a lot to change the "violent masculinity" (*Klassekampen* 12 January 2015). Both Bachelet and Skard are using rather essentialist gender roles in their efforts to bring more women into decision-making processes and create more equality – however, Skard does not claim that the

difference is innate but, rather, links it to culture and simultaneously points in a peaceful direction.

Implicit in some of these discourses of women as victims or as caring and hardworking, is the image of men as violent, uncaring and lazy. This approach recognises bias, for instance in journalism in general and war coverage in particular, by accentuating what has been left out of feminine perspectives – sometimes expressed as ‘women’s ways of knowing’. The articles that have traits of both postcolonial and difference feminism traditions focus on women’s ‘natural’ kindness, nurturing, pacifism and concern for others – hence that women are essentially different from men, but equal in value.

The newspapers’ cultural sections, covering artistic expressions of war and peace, also allow for gender stereotypes to thrive. An article describes an art exhibition, which “stresses the female expressions” where “Men spread death. Women get everything to grow” (*Bergens Tidende* 12 June 2015). However, there are a few articles that expose and challenge such a traditional view, such as the one in *Klassekampen* (15 June 2015), which argues that when female artists use violence in their work there are no rules other than those for male artists.

Newspaper stories combining postcolonial feminism with equality feminism

Combining the perspectives of postcolonial feminism with equality feminism may involve an anti-essentialist approach against seeing culture as internally homogenous and against biological determinism. Although some cultures are definitely less gender equal and less gender sensitive than others, this approach would be careful not to describe entire groups of people as without agency or as inherently violent or peaceful. As men predominate across the spectrum of violence worldwide, and there are numerous examples of how constructions of masculinity and femininity tend to normalise or naturalise violence against women (Gilani 2008; Moghadam 2005), essentialists will argue that men are inherently more aggressive than women.

However, cross-cultural studies of masculinities reveal a diversity that is impossible to reconcile in any simple manner with a biologically fixed pattern of masculinity (see, for example, Connell 2000). We must therefore also scrutinise social masculinities for the causes of gendered violence. Furthermore, to fully open up for a non-essentialist way of understanding gender and violence, it must be possible to admit that women are also capable of committing violence and horrific acts – and

there are plenty of such examples in recent history of conflict, such as female warders abusing prisoners in Abu Ghraib, or in the example in the analysed material, in which the Norwegian journalist Erling Borgen reminds us of how female torturers at Guantanamo also abused the male prisoners sexually (*Dagsavisen* 23 February 2015). In *Dagsavisen* (16 March 2015) the fact is stressed that among the Westerners who have left Europe to support ISIL, around 550 are women. Compared to most of the analysed material, this article is quite exceptional in its openness about women as violent actors. According to the French secret service, the article states, the wife of Amedy Coulibaly, Hayat Boumeddiene, who killed four hostages and a policewoman in the January 2015 terror in Paris, is even more extreme than her husband and is now probably in Syria where she recruits more girls and women to ISIL. Journalist Heidi Skjeseth put it this way:

We are not used to talking about women who fight in war. Or about women as extremists. But they are active, conscious and many are as ‘trigger happy’ as their male adversaries (*Dagsavisen* 16 March 2015).

This confirms earlier research, which has stressed how the focus on women as either victims or peace makers often involves neglecting their contribution to violence and the possibility of their expressing different types of agency (see, for example, Wilcox 2010). An article in *Aftenposten* (11 May 2015) is one of the few to open up such a perspective: “Women who support the Islamic state are not oppressed and do not lack courage. They find it difficult to live in Europe and wish for the purposeful life that they believe IS can give them.” There are several voices in the analysed news material which focus on how women should be seen as agents themselves. In an interview with *Aftenposten* (3 August 2013), Anita Pratap said: “We can support and assist women in other countries, but they have to go through the struggle themselves.” Within this anti-imperialist equality feminism approach, women in the global South are also provided with agency and courage, such as in the article in *Aftenposten* (25 January 2015) interviewing Samira, a young Yezidi girl. Samira was kept as a sexual slave by IS, but managed to escape, and showed ingenuity and courage. In *Klassekampen* (13 May 2015) we learn how the peace negotiator Luz Mendez, has been fighting against sexual violence on women in conflict situations in Guatemala. To stay within the terminology of Spivak, Mendez is a “brown woman helping other brown women”. The story is both exceptional in this material, and resonates well with the peace

journalism perspective in the manner through which it contextualises and focuses on peace-building opportunities.

In a non-essentialist perspective, as we get when we combine approaches, the men in are not all portrayed as violent or oppressive either. An article describes how five men from the group Afghan Peace Volunteers, in Kabul, dress in burkas to demonstrate their solidarity with Afghan women. Twenty-nine year-old Bashir is quoted: “The best way for a man to really understand how it is to be a woman is to put on a burka” (7 March 2015). This story is also one of the few in which the gender dimension is raised in stories about conflict and peace, although the focus is on men. It may remind us of the words of Robert Connell (2000: 30):

Some of the qualities in ‘traditional’ definitions of masculinity (e.g. courage, steadfastness, ambition) are certainly needed in the cause of peace. Active models of engagement are needed for boys and men, especially when peace is understood not just as the absence of violence, but as a positive form of life.

Very few of the articles combine different parameters of identity or power when describing gender characteristics, but there is at least one good exception in the selected material. Peder Kjøs in *Klassekampen* (27 September 2014), describes how in ‘post-violent societies’; where the life, health and property of the citizens are protected by the state and not by individuals, men who express themselves through violent behavior are considered less worthy compared to those who express themselves with empathy and intelligence. In its analysis of power structures, the report combines aspects of sexuality, ethnicity, geography and social class with gender, and stands out as a good example of an intersectionality approach, against a background of articles in which gender stories seldom include other parameters of identity or power.

Towards less essentialism?

Most of the articles in the newspaper material discussed here manifest the image of women as peaceful and caretakers, often smiling. This may be seen as positive in the light of peace journalism. At the same time there is a tendency in the material to neglect women’s contribution to violence and conflict. Explicit discussions of men and masculinities are also largely ignored and a conception of women and gender as equivalent is reproduced, and gender stereotypes reinforced. In its pure form, such rhetoric approaches a biological determinism, where simplistic conclusions from biology are adapted to psychology without including historical or social perspectives.

Such difference feminism, although useful in certain contexts to promote a larger space for women (for instance in peace processes), can be dangerous because it may easily reinforce gender stereotypes and differences which perpetuate bias and discrimination. There is a need to be aware when a potentially violent reality is veiled by discourses about gender equality, such as when discourses promoting more women in the army may be used to legitimise actions of war and that such discourses also may stick to an essentialist way of portraying gender, with women representing peaceful actions and values whereas men are violent and aggressive. A good example here is UN Resolution 1325, adopted by the Security Council in October 2000. The resolution has been rightly praised for its focus on women and equal participation in the resolution of conflicts and in post-conflict reconstruction, but it has also received censure for not attempting to change the way in which the concepts of gender, violence and security are understood and applied (see Wilcox 2010). Resolution 1325 at its best provides women in the global South with agency, but at the same time it tends to employ a rather essentialist approach to gender: that women by nature are more peaceful and caring.

The need to problematise the binary division where men equals violence and women peace was also underlined in the interview with Barbara Among. Being one of very few female reporters covering war in the region made her reflect a lot about the need for women's angles in conflict journalism, but she also evoked a certain frustration over women constantly being described as 'soft victims'. During her coverage of violent fights in northern Uganda, Among reacted upon the portrayal of young women who were forced to join up with rebels. There was little doubt about gendered violence and power abuse – however, Among stressed that some of these women also played an active part in the warfare. These wives were indeed forced to marry the rebels' commanders, but they were rebels as well, fighting on the frontline. They attacked villages, and killed people. It is very complex. So in the media they are portrayed as victims but they are in fact also perpetrators. And they have committed unforgivable atrocities (Barbara Among, interview February 2015). Among emphasised the need to see both men and women as complex, carrying potential for both good and bad, peaceful and violent actions.

Conclusion

The representation of gender in media in times of war and peace-building processes is

a highly important topic, not least since, globally, traditional female roles are still considered 'private'. This chapter's discussions show that to open up for more multifaceted representations of both femininities and masculinities in conflict and peace building it is crucial to counteract conceptions reinforcing gender stereotypes. Multifaceted and relational dimensions of gender should be given room in journalism and one should in particular be careful about generalising the experiences of women or men without taking their specific trajectories into account. More complex gender representations may also help to counter social hierarchies based on associations with male and female traits, which often tend to block female participation in post-conflict societies and deny men the right to be a victim.

To obtain sustainable peace it is important to also include the difficult and complex discussions about the underlying reasons for conflict. This echoes Galtung's (2002) urge for truth rather than propaganda, people rather than elites and solution-orientated rather than victory-orientated journalism. The postcolonial feminism perspective and the theoretical field of peace journalism are both concerned about getting more voices and perspectives heard. To move forward however, instead of co-opting women in the war discourse in the name of liberation and equality – there is also still a need to open up for multiple versions of masculinities that challenge the traditional patriarchal masculinity often closely connected to violence and competition. Combining approaches to feminism may help us to see men and women as equal in terms of their affinity for war and for peace and offer increased possibilities also of peaceful solutions to conflict. To operate journalistically in this complex terrain may be challenging; The stories we write will always be influenced by the doxa, what is taken for granted, in the culture and society and society we belong to. The findings here show that the more journalism moves in a non-essentialist direction, in terms of gender and geographical power structures, the closer it gets to peace journalism and nonviolent responses to conflict.

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