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Disputed territories & memory

Literature Review:

The role of nation states in managing memories of disputed territories

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In setting out the key debates across the feminist literature on state building and violent conflict, Sophie Whiting (Senior Lecturer, University of Bath) considers the relationship between memory and gender within nationalist projects. This section goes on to ask whether an agonistic approach to memory in embracing multi-perspectivity can help to move beyond constructions of women as 'passive victims' and award agency by acknowledging the various roles they play in conflict and peace building. Finally, Sophie argues how it is also crucial to consider appropriate methodologies, as women's experiences of past conflict are often found in the silences rather than the history books, state narratives, public commemorative spaces and dominant discourses.

A gendered analysis is central to understanding the use of the past in supporting, and challenging, nation states and nationalist projects. Navigating these dynamics requires a discussion of the literature that spans the fields of memory studies, international relations and peace and conflict studies. Within this parameter, the discussion below explores the gendered narratives of state-building (Hall, 1993; Nagel, 1998), the reproduction of public/private spheres though state lead discourse and policy (Peterson, 1994; Yuval-Davis, 1993), the role of 'motherhood' in nationalist projects (Abu-Duhou, 2003; Handrahan, 2004; Jad, 2011), the use of women's bodies as spaces for violence (Ali, 2009), women's support/resistance to national projects (Enloe, 1987; Vickers, 2006) and the reproduction of essentialist gender roles through commemorative practices (Jacobs, 2016; McDowell, 2008).

Until the early 1990s there was little research that analysed the dynamics between gender relations and nationalist projects. Traditional scholarship on states, citizenship, revolution and empire are accused by feminist scholars of suffering from gender blindness at best, or, at worst, the erasure of the role of women in the making of nations and nation states (Enloe, 2014; Hall, 1993; Nagel, 1998; Peterson, 1994, 2013; Yuval-Davis, 1993).

In traditional scholarship, the notion of state citizenship was constructed around the discourse of the 'rights of man' and 'fraternity of men' (Pateman, 1988). For example, Benedict Anderson describes how the 'nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately, it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two

centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings' (Anderson, 1991, p. 2). Such male defined comradery used to shape and maintain nations and nationalism was sustained through the structures of the state and the public sphere. For feminist scholars, the common discourse placing women as 'mother of the nation', an image which rests on female reproductive capacity in support of the nation, reinforced their position within the private sphere. It is this public / private dichotomy between nation (female) and state (masculine), that is revealing of why women have been further removed from the public arena and positions of political power (Hall, 1993).

Hall describes how national identities draw on a 'repertoire of traditions, myths and representations which are constantly reworked and rearticulated to different national projects' (1993, p. 99). Whilst women have historically been under-represented within the state apparatus and intelligentsia, they are described as being central to rediscovering 'collective memories' of a mythical or historical past that becomes the basis of nationalist aspirations (Yuval-Davis, 1997). Women are therefore not absent from the making or unmaking of the nation state, but the primary roles are awarded to, and written by men whilst women are the 'supporting actors' (Enloe, 2014). As described by Nagel, these 'roles' are played out in numerous ways;

> through the construction of patriotic manhood and exalted motherhood as icons of nationalist ideology; through the designation of gendered 'places' for men and women in national politics; through the domination of masculine interests and ideology in nationalist movements; through the interplay between masculine microcultures and nationalist ideology; through sexualized militarism including the construction of simultaneously over-sexed and under-sexed 'enemy' men (rapists and wimps) and promiscuous 'enemy' women (sluts and whores). (Nagel, 1998, p. 242)

The fall of communism brought questions of 'national identity', and what it meant, centre stage. Yet the role gender played in nationalist projects and nation building remained absent and insufficiently studied in mainstream analysis (Hall, 1993; Peterson, 1994). Feminist

scholars looked to address this by highlighting the participation of women in national and opposition movements and researching the mechanisms and structures intended to exclude women from political institutions and decision-making processes (Nagel, 1998, p. 243).

The gendered analysis of nationalism and nation states that emerged in the 1990s placed a focus on nations as gendered institutions, where through nationalist projects patriarchal social relations are formed and reproduced (Vickers, 2006; Yuval-Davis, 1997). Nation states therefore provide a structure, or what Connell (2003) refers to as 'gendered regimes', in which social relations can be institutionalised and reinforced. Within ethnically and culturally divided contexts, gendered constructions of femininity and masculinity are reinforced by different nationalist identities, their relationship to the state and proximity to power. Gender is therefore a powerful vehicle in defining the boundaries of the group to which one feels loyal, as Peterson explains;

> The gender hierarchy of masculine over feminine, and the nationalist domination of insiders over outsiders, are doubly linked. Nationalism is gendered in how the construction of group identity (allegiance to "us" versus "them") depends upon divisions of masculinity and femininity. (Peterson, 1994, p. 83)

Nation states therefore, provide a system of power relations in which ethno-national and gender identities are mutually constituted and reinforced (Ashe & McCluskey, 2015; Racioppi & O' Sullivan See, 2001). Gender becomes entwined within antagonistic constructions of 'us' and 'them' and therefore central to the analysis of memory across disputed territories.

Further exploration of the ways in which nation-states represent gendered institutions requires a discussion around the policies and discourses that help sustain these structures. Peterson (1994) refers to these strategies as the 'battle of the cradle' (over women's sexual reproduction) and a 'battle of the nursery' (over identities and loyalties), both of which are discussed further in turn below.

First, the 'battle of the cradle' refers to the oversight placed on women's biological reproduction and producers of 'national stocks' (Peterson, 1994; Yuval-Davis, 1997). Such

regulation exists through pro-natalist policies (restricting contraceptive knowledge and techniques, child care, denying abortions, and incentivising reproduction through material rewards) as well as the control over birth rates of 'other' groups (such as abortion, compulsory contraception and sterilisation) (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1989; Peterson, 1994; Yuval-Davis, 1997).

It is important to note that women are not passive in what Yuval-Davis refers to as 'national/biological warfare', women are also active participants by implementing the policies or sharing in the ideologies that control other women (1997). There are also circumstances where motherhood is considered as an active form of resistance. Abu-Duhou's research on motherhood in Palestine argues how the construction of women as the national producers needs to be viewed in the context of perpetual threat of war and conflict. Within this context, motherhood is framed and celebrated in the political and cultural texts, 'but only the right kind of mother is socially and nationally validated – the mother who can bear sons for the revolution' (Abu-Duhou, 2003, p. 85). In this context, motherhood becomes something more complex than the control over reproductive rights and becomes an act of defiance awarded agency.

Second, the 'battle of the nursery' describes how cultural transmission occurs through women (as primary care givers) to the next generation (Peterson, 1994). This strategy also describes how women provide symbolic markers as social and cultural identities through images, ritual and myth (McClintock 1991; Skurski 1994). Peterson goes on to describes how during the construction and reinforcement of a national or group cultural loyalty 'the metaphors of nation-as-woman and woman-as-nation suggest how women, as bodies and cultural repositories, become the battleground of group struggles' (Peterson, 1994, p. 79). Within these conflicts, a common discourse around the rape of women and territory emerges.

The rape of the body or nation not only disrupts territorial borders but the reproductive capacity of the community and land. For example, within the Palestinian national discourse

celebrating the fertile mother raising the next generation of soldiers for the revolution (Abu-Duhou, 2003), Palestine is also represented as an honourable woman whose honour was tarnished by the Zionist settlers in 1948 (Hall, 1993; Nagel, 1998). If the nation/woman cannot be protected against rape, then all rights to the land/body have been lost. This conflation of sexual violence and territory denies women agency in their own right, as they become instruments of male agendas and possession needing protection, thus, 'the motherland is female but the state and its citizen-warriors are male' (Peterson, 1994, p. 80).

These symbolic representations of women that are denied agency is reflected within the memory studies literature concerned with gendered representations of trauma and conflict. For example, women's experiences are recalled through the gendered narratives of the past that reinforce traditional stereotypes of women as suffering mothers as a symbol of sacrifice and martyrdom or sexual possessions of the perpetrators (Baumel, 1998; Eschebach, 2003). Women's involvement in resistance movements, insurgencies, civil society or political organisations are commonly erased at the expense of providing symbolic representations of nationhood or narratives of victimisation. In her research based on the Holocaust and violence surrounding the conflict in Bosnia, Jacobs demonstrates the contradiction that whilst female victims represent universal symbols of human tragedy there is also deliberate erasure of female narratives from public consciousness (Jacobs, 2008, 2016). For example, the rebuilding of ethno-nationalist identities in Bosnia centred on the gendered narratives of widowhood and maternal suffering whilst the trauma of rape has been supressed. Women therefore come to symbolise a particular kind of survivor, representing family and domesticity.

The presentation of women as symbolic of national honour and narratives concerning the defence of the mother-land are common themes during processes of nation building. The erasure or reinterpretation of the past to fit within these narratives presents a challenge for scholars to rediscover these 'silent voices'. The partition of Pakistan and India in 1947, which is described as such as huge event that it provides the pivot around which memories have been constructed (Butalia, 1997), offers insight into these challenges.

Whilst official records of partition reflect upon the constitutional history and political actors involved, the task of unearthing the history of women and lower castes, and what they went through both sides of the border, is more difficult. Estimates suggest that between twelve to fifteen million people moved across the newly demarcated boundaries in 1947 with around two million dying of malnutrition, disease and inter communal violence (Ali, 2009). Partition is also described as a deeply gendered process, which saw 75,000-120,000 women raped and abducted as well as being sold in to slavery and prostitution (Mohanram, 2019).

These histories that recount violence of partition that took place between communities, make little reference to the familial violence perpetrated by men towards women of their own community (Butalia, 1997). During the violence and mass displacement of people that accompanied partition, there was a fear of forced religious conversion. Whilst it was perceived that men had the physical and mental strength to resist or escape, women did not. Such vulnerability placed women in the category of passive subjects who needed to be saved. Published half a decade after partition, Butalia's (2000) collection of oral histories reflecting on this time, recalls incidences of women being killed by their families or taking their own lives, in both cases being viewed as martyrs for carrying out 'their duty' to save the purity of their race and religion 'from being diluted'.

In addition, women who ended up on the 'wrong side' of the border due to the violence that accompanied partition, over time married and had children with men of 'the other' community. Throughout the process of 'reclaiming' these women, their bodies and their purity, became of great importance to the community and the legitimacy of the state (Butalia, 1997, p. 104). Due to concern surrounding non acceptance and being perceived as 'soiled', women have been understandably reluctant to share their experiences. As a result, these histories become buried and removed from the official state building narrative (Ali, 2009). Mohanram (2019) describes how the amnesia surrounding the violence of partition permeates through history to explain more recent incidences of sexual violence and the state's reaction to them;

In partition rapes, the politicisation of sexual violence was moved to the zone of the private by the government, the law, the families and the archive itself. In 2012, women's sexuality and sexual violence are again relegated to the private, untouched by the law or any form of justice.

The lack of agency awarded to women through gendered narratives of the past and the amnesia often surrounding these experiences, continue to reinforce gendered power struggles in the present.

The example of partition demonstrates that through narratives, myths and traditions that support the memory of conflict, women appear, as Enloe suggests, only as 'an offstage chorus to a basically male drama' (1987, p. 259). Where women do appear, the parts they play are often symbolic and removed of agency. For example, research on the public performance of memory in Northern Ireland demonstrates how the commemorative landscape reinforces male privilege and power. The years following the Northern Ireland peace process saw a huge rise in commemorations, plaques and murals across streetscape as communities competed for representation of their respective experiences and interpretation of the conflict (Graham & Whelan, 2007; Rolston, 2012). These commemorations of conflict provide a stage for the performance of tribal politics and contestation between communities as well as demonstrate contemporary gendered power struggles. The claiming of space through memorialisation, not only constitutes a 'war by other means' but reproduces the wartime gender order (McDowell & Braniff, 2014). The cultural landscape therefore 'reinscribes gendered narratives of the past (and present) where the multiple experiences of women in Northern Ireland continue to be either obscured or male defined' (McDowell, 2008, p. 338). Therefore, whilst it is important to consider the gendered imagery within these commemorative spaces, particularly how they are used to shape and depict different national projects, it is also necessary to unpick the power structures behind such spaces. For example, despite gender equality being enshrined within the 1998 peace agreement Rolston argues 'it is the paramilitary men who decide who, what, where and when to commemorate'

(2018, p. 340). A gender lens of memory is therefore useful in revealing the structures behind memorialisation.

In unravelling the relationship between memory, gender and nation, it is also important to consider how gender intersects with other social divisions such as class, ethnicity, sexuality and age. Similarly, nationalist projects differ in terms of their inclusion of women. For example, Western neo liberal democracy required different relationships between the nation state and gender than anticolonial or settler-dominated imperial contexts (Vickers 2002). In post-colonial contexts, the constructions of gender / nation faces different dynamics. In European nationalist discourses, it was always European white masculinity that defined nationalist agency. In the colonial context, it was also the same white masculinity, which was able to reign supreme in controlling the colonised (Mohanty, 1991). In adapting European nationalist thought to local conditions, Massad points out how 'anti-colonial nationalists were faced with the task of defining not only the roles of men and women in the nationalist project, but also what a non-European nationalist masculinity would look like' (1995, p. 477). Exploring these hierarchies associated with identity and belonging also questions how we think of nation states and borders. Whilst borders exist as spatial boundaries between and within nation states, they also represent lines of inclusion and exclusion which can be experienced differently depending on class, ethnicity, sexuality and gender, and also how these factors intersect.

The role of diaspora communities and their relationship with the nation state also expands our conceptualisation of borders beyond territorial boundaries. For example, how gender ideologies can be used to reinforce the structural interdependence between nation states and diaspora communities. Through the case study of Singapore's 'go-regional' policy Yeoh and Willis (1999) argue that state-vaunted divisions of labour have been transnationalised to further entrench the gendering of diasporic workplaces, and the construction of women-in-diaspora as 'moral wives'. In such cases, the nation state is able to articulate gendered ideologies that transcend national borders and appropriate transnational space.

In surveying the dynamics between gender and the management of contested memories it is also useful to explore the literature within the field of peace and conflict studies. Feminist research on gender and conflict critiques the essentialist notions of gender which presents women as the biological and cultural reproducers of the nation in need of protecting, whilst men serve as the warriors and saviours of the nation (Muftić & Collins, 2014; Steans, 2013). When women do cross these distinct gendered lines and engage in violence, they are constructed as flawed, imperfect, and pathologically damaged (Sjoberg, 2007). Hegemonic masculinity, on the other hand, which is superior to femininity as well as other constructs of masculinity, is praised for possessing strong, rational, and competitive characteristics, and is encouraged through various institutions, such as the military (Enloe, 2014). In terms of conflict resolution, such essentialist narratives fail to acknowledge the role some women play in the continuation of conflict and the roles some men assume in its resolution (Side, 2015).

Violence in the early 1990s, such as that seen in Bosnia and Rwanda, focused attention on women's experience of conflict. Characterised by mass rape and genocide, these conflicts resulted in the international community's greater willingness to recognise global gender inequality and make moves to support the inclusion of women in peace building. Adopted in 2000, United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, and the wider Women Peace and Security (WPS) agenda that followed, acknowledged the specific effect of armed conflict on women and aimed to promote women's role in preventing and resolving conflict by ensuring female representation in peace processes, post-conflict reconstruction, and peace building (Braniff & Whiting, 2017).

Within the context of conflict resolution and transitional justice, feminist scholars argue how women's role in violence as well as the pursuit of peace continues to go unrecognised;

> The gap between policy and practice in gender and transitional justice is acute. The global study on the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 found that transitional justice mechanisms have paid limited attention to women's experiences of conflict, their priorities and needs, and the significance of pervasive gender inequalities

and biases that limit women's meaningful participation at every level and stage of postconflict transition. (Ahmed et al., 2016, pp. 527–528)

Despite commitment at an international level, the WPS agenda is criticised for continuing to place women as victims of violence which serve to reinforce 'protective stereotypes' that marginalise women as political actors (Bell & O'Rourke, 2010, Charlesworth, 2008). Accompanying this is the assumption that women are better than men at developing and sustaining peace. Whilst the expectations are that women can, and should, come together over their common female identity and opposition to conflict, similar demands are not made of men (Side, 2015). In dealing with the legacy of conflict through transitional justice mechanisms, a gender sensitive approach which also maps out the diversity of experiences and memories is called for to 'help cement the path to a peaceful post conflict society' (Meertens & Zambrano, 2010, p. 206).

The WPS agenda, which fits under a liberal peace building model, has been framed within the language of universal human rights and the importance of gender equality for nation states to make the transition away from conflict to democracy. Yet, in dealing with historical legacies this universalism can clash with attempts to acknowledge the diversity of experiences and the plurality of perspectives. Research by Debuysere (2016) explores this dynamic through the case study of the women's movement in Tunisia following the removal of President Ben Ali in January 2011. Before 2011, the women's movement was characterised by state-sponsored and top-down secular feminism, in which the Tunisian state promoted women's rights to disguise its authoritarian nature. The aftermath of the Tunisian uprising saw a growth in women's associations, many of which originated from Islamist circles and worked within Islamic tradition (Marks, 2013). Across the post uprising landscape tensions appeared between liberal and secular feminist groups – based on individual freedom and rights – and Islamic feminism. Islamist women's rights activists believe women and men have complementary, instead of absolute equal, roles within the family. Although equal in value, husbands and wives have different responsibilities within the family due to biological differences' (Debuysere, 2016, p. 230). As a consequence, there is a reluctance by some

Islamist women to accept elements relating to equality in marriage and family relations within international conventions (such as CEDAW, article 16) (Baderin, 2003, pp. 58–66).

Whilst from different ideological positions, the deepest division between secular and Islamic feminism is rooted in the legacy of the state's monopolization of secular feminism and oppression, imprisonment and discrimination against Islamist women (Debuysere, 2016, pp. 233–234). Rather than bringing different groups together under the single feminist umbrella of universal human rights, Debuysere suggests Mouffe's (2005) notions of 'conflictual consensus' and 'agonistic pluralism' can encourage a process of dialogue and provide a space where political conflict can be positively channelled – from antagonisms to agonisms.

This case study argues that the language of universal rights can cover up the diverse experiences and identities shaped by historical legacies and raises important questions relating to the management of the past in a way that accommodates multiple perspectives and facilitates a process of cross-ideological dialogue.

Conclusion

DisTerrMem provides an opportunity in which to consider how distinct, but inter-related, ways of remembering the past impact social relationships in the present. Examining these dynamics through a gendered lens is revealing of how nationalist projects construct the past but also how gender identities in the present are shaped by history.

In nationalistic constructions of the past, the essentialised positions of masculinity/ femininity fit with antagonisitic forms of memory that extends to other binary notions of us/them, good/evil and heroes/villains. In the context of conflict these essentialised constructions are extended to women as passive victims and men as the heroes. Such removal of agency serves to blinds us to the possibility of women as perpetrators, witnesses, traitors, as well as victims.

In moving towards a more cosmopolitan frame, at the start of the twenty-first century the international community turned to address the unique impact of conflict on women. What begun through UNSCR 1325 and then pursued through the wider WPS agenda was the principle that the inclusion of women was essential in the transition away from violence and movement towards building new democratic societies of universal rights and values. For critics, these efforts serve to reinforce a protectionist position that continues to view women as victims, whilst the liberal feminist approach of promoting inclusion overlooks power dynamics and structures that continue to reinforce these gender inequalities. Within this frame is also the notion that 'women are better at peace', often promoting women's groups and civil society actors to reach across societal divides based on their shared identity of being female, whilst not expecting similar demands of men.

DisTerrMem provides an opportunity to explore whether the application of agonistic memory can provide an alternative approach to remembering the past that awards agency and goes beyond essentialist constructions of gender. Alongside this it is important to break down a universal 'gendered experiences' of past conflict by acknowledging other intersecting identities (e.g. class, race, LGBTQ+, caste). Agonism therefore has the potential to embrace multi-perspectivity in order to move beyond passive victimhood and acknowledge the various roles women play in conflict and peace building (politicians, armed fighters, negotiators, community leaders, spy etc.). Finally, it is also crucial to note how women's experiences of past conflict is often found in the silences rather than the history books, state narratives, public commemorative spaces and dominant discourses. A key challenge is therefore how to reveal multiple perspectives of a past that is hidden and contains experiences of trauma through appropriate and compassionate methodologies.

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