

Gender as a causal factor in conflict

Jenny Birchall

Independent researcher and consultant

28 February 2019

Question

What evidence is there of gender as a causal factor in different inter and intra state conflicts? Please review evidence from the year 2000 onwards, identifying specific case examples and describing for each:

- *How gender acted as a causal factor in each case. This may include, for example, the influence of the impact of 'thwarted masculinities', gender based violence (GBV) as a driver, or the influence of hegemonic masculinity in motivations for joining armed groups.*
- *Where available, evidence of the relative significance of gender compared to other drivers of conflict in each case.*

Contents

Summary	3
The evidence base on gender as a causal factor in conflict	4
Links between gender equality, gender-based violence and conflict	4
Links between gender norms and conflict	6
Links between patriarchal institutions/structures and militarism	7
Gender as a causal factor interlinked with others	7
Case studies	7
Conflict and occupation in Iraq, 2003 to the present time	8
Conflict in northern Uganda, 1986 to 2006	8
Conflict in Colombia, 1964-2016	10
Conflict in Nepal, 1996-2006	11
Conflict in Sri Lanka, 1983-2002	11
Conflict in Myanmar, 1948 to the present time	12
Conflict in Sudan and South Sudan, 1955 to the present time	12
Nationalism and conflict in Kosovo, 1985-1999	13

The K4D helpdesk service provides brief summaries of current research, evidence, and lessons learned. Helpdesk reports are not rigorous or systematic reviews; they are intended to provide an introduction to the most important evidence related to a research question. They draw on a rapid desk-based review of published literature and consultation with subject specialists.

Helpdesk reports are commissioned by the UK Department for International Development and other Government departments, but the views and opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect those of DFID, the UK Government, K4D or any other contributing organisation. For further information, please contact helpdesk@k4d.info.

Themes emerging from the case studies	14
References	15

1. Summary

Evidence is available to demonstrate the role of gender in different inter and intra state conflicts. This evidence mainly points to correlation between gender and conflict, rather than causation.¹ Gender plays a key role in encouraging men – and in some cases, women – to take part in conflict, and it acts as a discourse to invoke, fuel and perpetuate conflict and violence. However, the evidence shows that gender is never alone as a cause or driver of conflict, and that it is always intertwined with other social, economic, cultural and political factors.

There are existing comprehensive reviews of evidence on the links between gender inequality and outbreaks of violent conflict (Herbert, 2014a, 2014b). These show clear correlations between levels of gender inequality and conflict, and emerging evidence to illustrate links between gender-based violence and conflict. There is a strong evidence base on the ways that beliefs and values behind unequal gendered roles and power relations are instrumental in building support for and perpetuating conflict (Wright, 2014).

There does not appear to be a great deal of literature analysing the gender dimensions of other drivers of conflict – such as, for example, land rights, natural resources, poor governance, inheritance, internal displacement, or food security – and applying this within conflict analysis frameworks. There is, however, a body of academic literature that focuses on the links between patriarchal institutions/structures and militarism more broadly (Cockburn, 2010; Duncanson, 2013).

There is less literature available that focuses specifically on individual conflicts, examining the role that gender played in them. Evidence on the gendered impacts of particular conflicts and the importance of gender equality in peace making processes is far more common. However, it is possible to find references to the gendered causes of conflict within literature that is primarily focused on impacts or peace making. Within the time designated to prepare this report, it has been possible to identify evidence and develop case studies on gender and conflicts in Iraq, northern Uganda, Colombia, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Sudan and South Sudan, and Kosovo. Partly due to their nature as individual, context-specific case studies, and partly due to the focus of available literature, the case studies tend to focus on motivations of individuals and groups to take part in inter and intra state conflicts, rather than the gender dynamics of broader systemic causes of conflict. Emerging themes from these cases include:

- Motivations to join and support armed conflict are gendered

While in some cases men and women became combatants in conflict for similar reasons; to support political ideology they believed in, to avenge wrongs against them or their families, to escape poverty or improve their social status, there were also some clear gender differences in motivations. Women reported joining armed groups in order to escape gender-based violence or

¹ Some of the literature clearly distinguishes between correlation and causation when considering the role of gender in conflict. Herbert (2014a p.4) notes that the literature included in her review indicates that “it is not known whether conflict leads to greater gender inequality, whether gender inequality leads to conflict, whether gender equality is a proxy for something else that might cause conflict, or whether countries that are prone to one type of violence are also prone to others”. Some academic experts argue that “the point is not that gender causes war in a direct, immediate and specific way in particular cases, but that gender can be seen as the underlying root cause in all wars” (an expert consulted as part of the production of this report). This report looks broadly at literature that identifies a range ‘causes’ for individual conflict, but this does not mean these studies are implying ‘causation’ in a theoretical, positivist sense.

the marginalisation that followed it, or to benefit from greater gender equality as a member of a state or rebel force. Meanwhile, men were encouraged to take part in violent conflict as a way of adhering to dominant ideas of successful manhood that they could not meet by other routes.

- Gender stereotypes fuel armed conflict

Gender stereotypes around women as victims and in need of protection are used to fuel support for conflict. In the majority of the case studies, gender stereotypes around men as protectors, providers and decision makers, and as strong, brave and heroic, were actively at work.

- Gendered causes of conflict are interlinked with others

While gender emerges as a key factor in all of the cases, it is always linked to other drivers of conflict. Ideas of 'thwarted masculinities' usually involve social and economic factors such as unemployment, access to land or education, generational differences and the requirements of marriage customs. Ethnic, and/or religious differences, as well as nationalism, also intersect with gender norms, and the use of gender stereotypes to invoke 'protective' action when women and girls have been abused tends to be linked to broader political motivations. These interlinkages mean that it has not been possible to find evidence that considers the relative contribution of gender, as compared to other causes and drivers, in each individual conflict. In addition, while the research question for this report does not request that the significance of gender as a causal factor is quantified, it is important to note that the academic experts consulted as part of the report's preparation advised that such an approach would not be methodologically possible.

2. The evidence base on gender as a causal factor in conflict

There already exist some comprehensive reviews looking broadly at the evidence base for the links between gender equality, gender-based violence, gender norms and conflict. These are briefly summarised below.

Links between gender equality, gender-based violence and conflict

There are two comprehensive GSDRC helpdesk reports (Herbert, 2014a; 2014b), looking at the links between outbreaks of violent conflict with gender based violence and women's empowerment (or lack of empowerment). As these reports point out, there are a number of studies that find a strong correlation between levels of gender inequality and conflict. Herbert (2014a, p.3) notes that:

- There is substantial evidence that traditional patriarchal gender identities lead to militaristic and violent conflict approaches.
- The more years a country has had female suffrage, the more likely it is to resolve disputes without military violence.
- Better gender equality can indirectly increase a country's stability through its impact on wealth/income.

However, Herbert found relatively few studies that show a link between gender-based violence (or the physical security of women and girls) with conflict. She discusses the data gaps in this

area, with fragmented or unavailable data, difficulties in comparability, and data contamination by political agendas (Herbert, 2014b).

Herbert's reports point to emerging research that has found that countries with high levels of violence against women and girls (including domestic abuse, female infanticide and sex-selective abortion) are more likely to experience conflict than those which do not. Herbert summarises empirical studies conducted by Hudson et al (2009, 2012), as well as by Caprioli and Boyer (2001) which demonstrate the following correlations:

- The higher the level of violence against women, the more likely a nation state is to be non-compliant with international norms and to behave less peacefully in the international system.
- The higher the level of violence against women, the worse a nation state's relations with its neighbouring countries.
- The larger the gender gap in a state, the more likely it is to be involved in inter and intra state conflict, and to use violence first in a conflict.
- Higher levels of women's representation in parliament, and parity in education, may have a pacifying effect on state behavior, reducing the likelihood of inter-state war.

As Herbert points out, however, it is important to note that gender-based violence also occurs in many countries with high levels of gender equality and low levels of violent/armed conflict (Herbert, 2014b).

In addition, recent doctoral research conducted by one of the experts consulted as part of the production of this report highlighted links between disapproval of gender equality and intolerance of homosexuality; both with correlations with armed conflict. It found that "the countries that are the most gender unequal and the most homophobic are the ones that have the highest levels of societal violence and also the ones that run the highest risk of having armed conflicts on their own territories" (Ekvall, 2019).

While the studies discussed above provide insight on the links between gender equality and conflict in general terms, it is more difficult to find robust evidence on these links in the context of specific inter and intra state conflicts. One expert contributing to this report noted that this lack of evidence is partly due to a focus, in feminist analysis, on how gender can produce militarism, of which armed conflict is just one expression. Thinking about individual conflicts as discrete phenomena therefore tends to miss the systemic aspects of this. There also appears to be a gap in literature that analyses the gender dimensions of other drivers of conflict – such as, for example, land rights, natural resources, poor governance, inheritance, internal displacement, or food security – and applies this within conflict analysis frameworks. In another GSDRC review which looked at the gender dimensions of conflict drivers and stabilisation in eastern DRC, Combaz (2013) found that while there was a large body of literature on conflict drivers, very few adopted a systemic gender approach. The main focus was on sexual and gender-based violence, which "distorts and limits any deeper understanding of what causes and drives conflict" (International Alert, 2012; cited in Combaz, 2013 p.6). She found a small number of studies that recognised the gender dimensions of land as a conflict driver in the DRC (Combaz, 2013 p.6).

Links between gender norms and conflict

There is growing evidence around the ways that the beliefs and values behind unequal gendered roles and power relations are instrumental in building support for and perpetuating conflict. Desk research conducted on masculinities, conflict and peace building for Saferworld, which looked at projects and programmes by 19 organisations or networks across five continents, found “a growing body of research suggesting that gender roles – and patriarchal notions of masculinity in particular – can fuel conflict and insecurity” (Wright, 2014 p. 2). This comprehensive review illustrates the ways in which militarised notions of masculinity based on domination and violence can: motivate men to participate in violence; allow political and military actors to deliberately promote violent masculinities in order to recruit combatants and build support for war; support the use of violence as a route to attaining other symbols of manhood; and encourage men who feel unable to live up to societal expectations of masculinity to join armed groups.

Some of the literature looking at the influence of masculinities on conflict uses the concept of ‘thwarted masculinities’. This is used to describe “the experiences of men who are unable to conform to standards of manhood imposed by their societies, for example because they are unable to find work, get married or support a family” (Wright, 2014 p.11). Some of these men are thought to be more likely to commit violence, including as combatants in armed conflicts, as “a means of reasserting one’s masculinity in the absence of other, non-violent means” (Wright, 2014 p.11).

There is also evidence examining the way that roles and norms around femininity are implicated in violence and conflict. On the one hand, discourses of women as weak and defenceless are used to prop up and perpetuate masculinities that involve men as protectors, using violence if necessary (Cohn, 2012; Jackson et al, 2011; Wright, 2014). In some cases, women may play a role in supporting these discourses, by encouraging male family members to take part in forms of violent communal conflict such as cattle raiding, and deriding men who refuse to do so (Wright, 2014; El-Bushra and Sahl, 2005). On the other hand, as the case studies below show, women have been actively involved as combatants in some conflicts. However, as Wright’s review points out, “when women do take up arms, they are usually considered to be transgressing traditional gender roles, because a willingness to use violence is considered a masculine, not a feminine trait” (2014 p.15-16).

As the case studies below show, there is no one version of ‘dominant masculinity’ that can be cited as a contributory factor in conflict. Eriksson Baaz and Stern, in their research on militarised masculinities in the context of the DRC, note that “while shaped in a global landscape, military masculinities are constructed in national and local contexts and are also often articulated in various ways” (2017, p.534). While it is more difficult to measure the ways that gender norms and roles correlate with a propensity for conflict, as has been done with the correlations between states’ gender equality scores and conflict and/or violence, it is clear from the available evidence that gender norms around masculinity and femininity play an influential role. Theidon, in her research on the demobilisation of combatants in Colombia, argues that “constructing certain forms of masculinity is not incidental to militarism; rather, it is essential to its maintenance. Militarism requires a sustaining gender ideology as much as it needs guns and bullets” (Theidon, 2009 p.3).

Links between patriarchal institutions/structures and militarism

Several of the academic experts contributing to this report were keen to stress that while looking at the different ways that gender has played a role in individual conflicts is important, this should be done with a parallel awareness of the way that militarism and conflict is driven by broader global and regional structures and systems that are deeply patriarchal in nature. Wright (2014) points out that “gender norms are embedded within social, cultural, economic and political systems which reinforce and sustain them. Addressing gender norms which drive violence and insecurity is therefore not only a matter of changing the way men and women think about their identities but also examining the structures which uphold those gender norms and which are, in turn, upheld by them” (Wright, 2014, p.16).

Some academics have focused on the ways that militarism is based on, and strengthened by, a range of unequal power relations, including those of gender. Cockburn, for example, discusses war ‘institutions’ (such ministries of defence, arms manufacturers and army training academies) as “a loci of several dimensions of power, economic, national – and patriarchal” (Cockburn, 2010 p.147). Some analyses have built on Connell’s (1995) concept of hegemonic masculinity, which structures not just relations between women and men, and between men, but also other intersecting forms of domination and exploitation, stretching from the interpersonal to the geopolitical realm. Connell’s work is also important in demonstrating the potential for subversive masculinities as well as hegemonic ones (see Cockburn, 2010). There is a strong body of literature on the area of gender, masculinities and militarism in a global context (for example Cohn, 2012; Dean, 2001; Duncanson, 2013; Peterson, 2008).

Gender as a causal factor interlinked with others

Inputs from experts consulted in the preparation of this report also stressed the importance of considering gender as a causal factor inextricably linked with other factors, including weak or unaccountable governance, ethnic, communal and religious tensions, social exclusion, reduced livelihood, education and employment opportunities, lack of access to health care, security and justice, and land rights (Wright, 2014 p.16-17; El-Bushra, 2003 p.262).

Cockburn (2010) argues, as part of her empirical research looking at women’s groups and networks opposing militarism and building peace, that “patriarchal gender relations are seen to be intersectional with economic and ethno-national power relations in perpetuating a tendency to armed conflict in human societies” (Cockburn, 2010 p.139). When describing these three types of power relations, she argues: “if one is at work, the others will be too” (2010 p.152). While the research question for this report does not request that the significance of gender as a causal factor in conflict as compared to others is *quantified*, the experts inputting into this report cautioned against attempts to do this, and noted that, for the reasons discussed above, it would be extremely difficult to do this.

3. Case studies

The case studies below are the best evidenced in the literature identified for this report. Of the links between gender and conflict introduced above, the case studies mostly demonstrate the links between gender norms and conflict, and the ways that gender drivers are linked with other causal factors. Partly due to their nature as individual, context-specific case studies, and partly due to the focus of available literature, the case studies tend to focus on motivations of

individuals and groups to support and take part inter and intra state conflicts, rather than the gender dynamics of broader systemic causes of conflict.

Conflict and occupation in Iraq, 2003 to the present time

Since the Western invasion of Iraq, there have been multiple armed actors involved in violent conflict there, including ISIS, armed opposition groups and tribes, the Iraqi security forces and the Kurdish Regional Government's armed forces. Dietrich and Carter (2017) look at the origins of ISIS in Iraq. Originally pledging allegiance to al Qaeda, and actively participating in the 2003–11 insurgency, ISIS captured major cities including Mosul, Raqqa and Deir-ez-Zor before rebranding itself as a Caliphate. Dietrich and Carter discuss some of the complicated perceptions around causes of ISIS' rise, which include: alienation as a result of the 'sectarianisation' of the political system; perceived corruption and exclusionary policies and injustice, as well as competing interest among political parties; feelings of insecurity due to unregulated and unaccountable sectarian militias and the increasingly Shia make-up of Iraqi security forces; and underlying structural tensions including lack of services, education and employment and discrimination against minorities (Dietrich and Carter, 2017 p.8).

In addition to, and intertwined with these causes, Dietrich and Carter also describe the ways that gender norms have fuelled tensions and insecurity in conflict-affected areas of Iraq. These include the imposition of radicalised gender norms of masculinity that establish men as sole providers of income. Lack of access to alternative livelihood opportunities meant that men were pressured to join ISIS in order to access income. Similarly, young men who were under pressure to secure sufficient means to marry and form their own families were more likely to engage in 'risky coping strategies' such as joining ISIS. Meanwhile, gender norms that stigmatise women for being unmarried mean that some have felt pressured to marry ISIS members in order to ensure their family network has access to services and livelihoods opportunities (Dietrich and Carter, 2017:29).

Bloom (2010) discusses the ways in which, under certain circumstances, the harassment and abuse of women can become a contributory factor in mobilisation towards conflict. In Iraq, accusations of US soldiers raping women detainees at Abu Ghraib from 2006 became "part of the rhetoric to mobilise people to join the insurgency" (2010, p.446). Bloom notes that this does not happen as much in efforts to mobilise populations where women are being attacked locally, because of honour codes meaning that publicising sexual harassment and abuse would bring shame upon families. However, the mobilisation of women into violent action increased after the abuse of women at Abu Ghraib was revealed, with a reported 400 percent increase in female suicide bombers in Iraq in 2008. Bloom concludes that "it is clear that targeting the women of an occupied country has long-term societal effects that contribute to their mobilisation into violence" (Bloom, 2010 p.449). Also looking at the rhetoric of violence being necessary in order to protect women, Jackson et al (2011) note the ways that women's rights have been used by invading forces, including in Iraq, stating that "the war on terrorism has been constructed and portrayed in ways that uphold the view of women as victims of violence in need of protection by men" (2011 p.168-169).

Conflict in northern Uganda, 1986 to 2006

El-Bushra (2003) and El-Bushra and Sahl's (2005) analyses of the ACORD programme's research into gender sensitive programming in conflict affected areas looks at the causes of the conflict and unrest in northern Uganda and discusses the role of gender inequality and norms

among these causes. While a truce was agreed between the Lord's Resistance Army and the government in 2006, small bands of fighters remain at large in the region (Okiror, 2016). The conflict resulted in gross impoverishment and trauma in Acholi societies through the loss of livestock and land, various human rights abuses, and considerable out-migration. El-Bushra points out that a particular feature of this conflict was the alienation of youth (both male and female), many of whom decide to join the military of either side in response to abuses they had experienced or in the absence of other prospects (El-Bushra, 2003 p.254).

El-Bushra and Sahl's analysis of testimonies collected by ACORD finds that: "It is difficult to identify with certainty what factors caused the war, or what has enabled it to carry on for almost 20 years. It is even more difficult to see clearly how gender differences or gender identities have had an impact. Certainly the testimonies do not throw light directly on this issue. However, some general conclusions can be drawn, based on the analysis of the testimonies and the supporting material" (El-Bushra and Sahl, 2005 p.26). These conclusions include:

- Key ideas about masculinity in Acholi culture – the notion of the ideal man as a strong fighter and protector, never defeated and never giving up, a provider and controller, a figure of authority and leadership – are impossible to realise for many men, particularly those who are internally displaced camps, where men have few opportunities for obtaining an income, many are unable to provide for and protect the family, and have lost the power to exercise authority, leadership, or control over resources. As a result, many men now join the army so that they can have access to unattached women or earn money to pay dowry.
- Traditional ideas about femininity have also been disrupted – women who can no longer rely on their families or husbands to provide for them or their children are adopting livelihoods which take them away from Acholi ideals of submissive womanhood. Some join armed forces, either for economic reasons or because of a desire for revenge at the abuses they have suffered by the other side.

Stites' (2013) study of masculinity, violence and livelihoods in Karamoja, Uganda, argues that "violence has become entrenched within the livelihoods of male youth seeking to establish hallmarks of normative manhood against a backdrop of the erosion of traditional livelihood options and customary authority". She discusses the ways that "alternative means of achieving status and providing for families have emerged, and these means often include violence" (Stites, 2013 p.133).

Analysis by Dolan (2003), also of the ACORD data, focuses on the ways that masculinity allows men to exercise power over other men in situations of conflict. Dolan argues that "in the face of the dynamic interaction between a model of masculinity and a context of violence, the possibility of developing alternative masculinities collapses. Unable to live up to the model, but offered no alternative, some men resort to acts of violence" (Dolan, 2003 p.1). Dolan notes that men in Acholi society will continue to be seen as boys until they are married and have children. They are expected to provide physical protection for their dependents, but as Dolan notes, "this is complicated by the fact that responsibility for provision of protection has to a large extent been taken out of the hands of individual men" (Dolan, 2003 p.5). Men are now expected to earn protection for themselves and their families by being loyal citizens who put their trust in the state and are prepared to take up arms either in the army or in local defence units. Dolan argues that the Ugandan state precipitated a collapse in masculinities through its practices of militarisation and forcible internal displacement, emasculating men who, as a result, were more predisposed to

join the military (Dolan, 2011). These shifting ideas around masculinity are intertwined with those around ethnic identity, with northern Ugandans being seen by those in the south as backward, primitive and prone to militarisation. As El-Bushra and Sahl note, “in this way, ethnic and gender identity plays a role in perpetuating the vicious cycle of conflict (2005, p.28).

In addition to these changes around masculinities, another study looking at pastoral conflict and gender relations in Uganda makes some interesting points. Mkutu (2008) looks at changes to feminine roles and norms, arguing that as pastoral livelihoods become increasingly unsustainable, and existing inter-communal resource-based conflicts are exacerbated by the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, women are taking on new roles to ensure their families’ survival, including making decisions about guns and ammunition. Mkutu argues this gives them more power to determine their own welfare against aggressors. This power is limited, however. The research found no examples of women actually using weapons, and there were plenty of instances of women being beaten and abused if they did not show respect to men returning from cattle raids (Mkutu, 2008 p.244). Research by Mootz et al (2017) into cattle raiding in Karamoja found that gender-based violence was cited as one of the motivations for raiders. As one research participant reported, as well as raiding huts and taking cows, “they come also and they abduct girl children. And when they take girls children to their place, they tend to turn them to become their housewives” (Mootz et al, 2017 p.376).

Conflict in Colombia, 1964-2016

The long history of violent conflict in Colombia is most often attributed to structural factors rooted in the country’s political power structures and processes, along with social and economic demands and conflicts fuelled by the appearance of guerrilla groups and paramilitaries in the 1960s and 70s (Conciliation Resources, 2004). Colombia also has high levels of inequality and injustice toward minorities (Conciliation Resources, 2019). Research with former combatants in Colombia reveals the role that ideas around masculinity have played in decades of militarisation and armed conflict. Male combatants learned to “be hard and impenetrable, both physically and emotionally,” in a form of ‘hyper-masculinity’ (Conciliation Resources, 2015 p.48).

Theidon (2009) notes that for the Colombian ex-combatants she interviewed, “being a ‘good man’ includes protecting and providing for one’s family; thus, setting down one’s weapon may be emasculating in several senses” (2009, p.21). She describes how the Colombian armed forces marketed enlistment as an opportunity for social mobility, with soldiering tied up with ideas around citizenship. Social mobility was also a pull factor for those joining guerrilla groups: “The absolute majority of these men come from poor backgrounds; for some of the young men, joining the guerrilla meant they had food, a gun, and a uniform” (2009, p.16). In addition, Theidon’s interviewees explained that joining “allowed them to ‘feel like a big man in the streets of their barrios’, to ‘go out with the prettiest young women’ and to ‘dress well’, privileges they insist would not have been possible without carrying a gun” (2009, p.17-18).

At the same time, Conciliation Resources found that around 40 percent of combatants in the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) were female. For these combatants, “participating in armed violence is often seen as a transgression of traditional female gender roles” which brought stigma rather than prestige (Conciliation Resources, 2015 p.48). Qualitative studies of combatants in Colombia have found that many female combatants in Colombia joined armed groups in attempt to flee domestic and communal gender-based violence (Strachan and Haider, 2015).

Conflict in Nepal, 1996-2006

After its transition to democracy in 1990, Nepal experienced civil war and challenges to the peace process that followed. Maoist insurgency lasted for a decade and there was a mass mobilisation against the monarchy (Conciliation Resources, 2018). Research by Saferworld into the rehabilitation of combatants in the Maoist People's Liberation Army (PLA) looked at motivations for joining the army. One of the reasons identified was to gain gender equality, with 20 percent of female combatants saying that the political ideology of the Unified Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist (UCPN-M), which promoted gender equality and women's empowerment, was their main reason for joining the party. Nearly 25 percent of female combatants had joined the Maoist PLA because of sexual abuse and rape from state security agencies (Dalrymple, 2010). In addition:

"All female combatants interviewed stated they felt more empowered as a woman after joining the Maoist PLA. They explained how they enjoyed equal footing with men within the Maoist PLA structure and UCPN-M organisation. Ninety percent of female combatants (both current and former) stated that they found themselves to be different from other women in society as they felt more empowered, both politically and physically. Current and former combatants (both men and women) attributed the patriarchal nature of Nepali society to be the main reason behind the subjugation of women, especially in rural areas" (Dalrymple, 2010 p.6).

Other reasons cited by both women and men combatants were: to gain social and political empowerment; an attraction towards the Maoist political ideology; and forced recruitment. Interestingly, some of the women combatants had joined the PLA when Maoists asked for one recruit from each household, and they wanted to protect male family members.

Conflict in Sri Lanka, 1983-2002

Post-independence in Sri Lanka, violence erupted between the Sinhalese majority government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in a struggle over political identity, ethnicity and power. LTTE gained control over a substantial part of the country as it fought for a separate Tamil state in the north east. There were large scale conflict-related deaths, human rights violations and displacement (Conciliation Resources, 2008). Analysis of women's participation in the LTTE has uncovered a complex picture around the role of gender as a causal factor. By 2000, roughly half of LTTE members were women or girls (Cunningham, 2003). Rape by security and peacekeeping forces is cited as one of the primary reasons for these combatants joining LTTE. Interrelated reasons for joining were the idea of *eelam* (freedom), and the idea of sacrifice. These concepts had particular, gendered interpretations for female recruits who had suffered rape and sexual abuse, with *eelam* seen as offering them a chance to 'redeem themselves' by fighting for Tamil freedom, and sacrifice through suicide bombing becoming "an acceptable 'offering' for women who can never be mothers, a process that is reportedly encouraged by their families" (Cunningham, 2003 p.180). For these combatants, who faced being ostracised by their families and communities after rape, gender-based violence created a clear pathway into participation in conflict.

At the same time, and partly as a response to the rise in female combatants, there were attempts to 'traditionalise' gender narratives. Writing about the insurgency, Tambiah (2005) discusses the ways that ideas around normative gender and sexuality were used by Tamils to support and invoke nationalist discourses, with "recovering the nation" linked to "recovering dominant sexual values" (Tambiah, 2005 p.249). Women seen to have transgressed these values were clearly

differentiated and offered a pathway of militarisation and sacrifice, while other women were called upon to comply with traditional dress codes and behaviours.

Conflict in Myanmar, 1948 to the present time

Myanmar has seen conflict between armed groups and the state since its independence in 1948. There have been high levels of displacement and violent crackdowns on democracy groups by the military regime. From 2010 onwards a peace process has been underway involving the government and ethnic armed organisations (EAOs), although debates remain about the success of the process. Since 2012, the persecution of the Rohingya community, and an increase in anti-Muslim attitudes and communal violence have taken centre stage.

Qualitative research conducted by International Alert in two locations in Myanmar; southern Shan state and Tanintharyi region, provide examples of how expectations of masculinity can combine with ethnic differences and economic factors to drive behaviour that exacerbates or leads to an increase in violent conflict (Naujoks and Ko, 2018a). Dominant ideas around masculinity were based on two key expectations:

- Protector: to protect the family or the community from harm, from those perceived as enemies. The community to be protected could be understood as one clan, an ethnic group or as referring to the Union of Myanmar.
- Provider: to provide for the family and meet their needs, such as shelter and food. To be the breadwinner.

Naujoks and Ko describe the ways that these dominant expectations of masculinities “drive male conscription into armed groups with varying levels of voluntariness” (2018c, p4). Research participants expressed ideas about men as superior, more important, educated, capable of leadership and decision making. They were expected to be strong and tough, respected, have integrity, and have no fear (Naujoks and Ko, 2018b, p.20). They saw the EAOs as protectors of the ethnic community against a central military regime. Being a member of a EAO was source of respect, a sense of ‘doing your duty’ to protect the community (Naujoks and Ko, 2018b, p.26). During times of intense conflict, conscription was common and community leaders would select men to join, invoking the same ideas around men as protectors of their communities.

Similar ideas around masculinity were also expressed by research participants when discussing the Tatmadaw (Myanmar Armed Forces). Men had joined for economic reasons: “to provide for the family, to get a job with benefits, for a career or education opportunities during the decades of low economic prospects”. They had also joined for “the expected glory and service to their country – in line with the ‘protector’ ideal but not linked to feeling threatened” (Naujoks and Ko, 2018b, p.29).

Conflict in Sudan and South Sudan, 1955 to the present time

Sudan, and since its independence in 2011, South Sudan, has seen devastating civil war for over fifty years. There have been many causal factors during this time, including colonial boundaries, disputes over natural resources, exclusion of minority groups, the interference of regional and global powers, and religious and cultural tensions (El-Bushra and Sahl, 2005 p.30). El-Bushra and Sahl looked at Sudan in their analysis of the ACORD programme’s research into gender sensitive programming in conflict affected areas. They argued that the huge number of people internally displaced in Sudan “favours a type of masculine identity in which frustration and

deprivation can easily spill over into violence” (El-Bushra and Sahl, 2005 p.40). Internally displaced people, who in their homeland used to grow their own food, found themselves cut off from this means of subsistence and dependent on insecure self-employment and foreign aid. The ACORD testimonies highlighted the ways that men who are unable to fulfil the role of provider and protector of the household can turn to violence as a means of maintaining control and power. Young men in particular were more likely to use violence fuelled by access to weapons as a tool for acquiring economic goods in the absence of alternative sources of income.

Research conducted by Saferworld demonstrates the ways that militarised notions of masculinity played a role in encouraging young men to join the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA) or non-state armed groups linked to their communities or ethnic groups (Wright, 2014 p.7). Men join up to gain much-needed income, but also for other reasons. Wright notes that “in the context of large-scale unemployment and few educational opportunities, it is not easy for men to achieve a sense of identity and to live up to societal expectations of them as men. Recruitment into the SPLA or non-state armed groups is closely linked with masculinity, and can provide a sense of identity and self-worth which would otherwise be difficult to find” (Wright, 2014 p.7).

Conflict and violence within and between communities has continued to take place after South Sudan’s independence in 2011. Wright outlines the ways that the availability of small arms has, along with food insecurity, water scarcity, widespread unemployment, and the absence of effective security forces, fuelled violent cattle raiding. Young men are not considered to be ‘men’ until they are married. They are expected to pay a prospective bride’s family in cattle before they can get married, and men who have not gone on a cattle raid or who have failed to bring back cattle may be shamed in their communities. Men may take brides either by consent or by force without having paid the full price expected by the bride’s family, which can result in revenge attacks. Wright argues that gender norms are deeply implicated in the practice of cattle raiding: “Owning a gun and participating in a cattle raid are rites of passage for adolescent boys, and for men these are symbols of manhood and virility which confer social status” (Wright, 2014 p.7). The practice of cattle raiding highlights the intertwined nature of gender roles – both masculine and feminine – with other social and economic factors, acting together as a driver and perpetuator of conflict.

Nationalism and conflict in Kosovo, 1985-1999

Two studies focus on the ways that accusations of gender-based violence fueled the nationalist and ethnic tensions in the run up to the violent break-up of Yugoslavia. Bracewell (2000) notes that while historians have assessed the causes of the Yugoslav wars in terms of nationalist ideologies, economic crisis, disintegration of state systems and great power politics, the connections between violent masculinity, militarism and nationhood should not be ignored. She illustrates this point by discussing the ways that allegations of rapes of Serbian women by Albanian men in Kosovo were linked to nationalist discourses around protecting Serbian women from Albanian, Muslim men. While rape was only one of the acts that Albanians in Kosovo were accused of by the Serbs, it was the one that attracted most outrage. Bracewell argues that “defenders of the Kosovo Serbs interpreted sexual violence in Kosovo as part of a deliberately orchestrated Albanian campaign to terrorise and humiliate the Kosovo Serbs, encourage them to sell their lands and emigrate” (2000, p.565). In this way, “a narrative of threatened masculinity [...] offered militarism as a way of winning back both individual manliness and national dignity. Not everyone accepted this reasoning, but it was a potent factor in making war thinkable – even attractive” (Bracewell, 2000 p.567).

Meanwhile, research by Munn (2008) illustrates the ways that ideas around masculinities and national identity were active in the build-up to violence for those on the other side of the conflict. Munn's interviews with former Kosovo Liberation Army fighters showed how "stories of heroic men have become a means through which the community constructed a sense of manliness and masculinity" (2008, p.145) These stories, at the same time as exalting manly warriors, also marginalised 'less masculine' men – such as non-Albanian men and gay men – as well as women. The interviews revealed other attitudes around masculinity; for example, men's status depended on having a wife and children and being able to control them, and unmarried men were not thought of as able to seriously take part in political matters. This hegemonic version of masculinity was central in the nationalist discourses that preceded the outbreak of violence.

4. Themes emerging from the case studies

The case studies above contain evidence on some of the ways that gender fuels and perpetuates inter and inter state conflicts. Some themes emerging from this evidence include:

Motivations to join and support armed conflict are gendered

While in some cases men and women became combatants in conflict for similar reasons; to support political ideology they believed in, to avenge wrongs against them or their families, to escape poverty or improve their social status, there were also some clear gender differences in motivations. In Sri Lanka, Nepal and Colombia, women reported joining armed groups in order to escape gender-based violence or the marginalisation that followed it, or to benefit from greater gender equality as a member of a rebel/opposition force. In Iraq, Uganda, Colombia, Myanmar, Sudan and Kosovo the evidence shows that norms around masculinities were influential in creating pathways into conflict for men who found they could not adhere to dominant ideas of successful manhood by other routes.

Gender norms and stereotypes fuel armed conflict

The case studies on Iraq and Kosovo in particular demonstrate the ways that gender stereotypes around women as victims and in need of protection are used to fuel support for conflict. The evidence from Sri Lanka shows how complex and different gender stereotypes can be at work simultaneously, with some women tasked with reclaiming the nation's moral values while others are encouraged to commit acts of terror in order to 'redeem' themselves. In the majority of the case studies, gender stereotypes around men as protectors, providers and decision makers, and as strong, brave and heroic, were actively at work. Men who did not or could not match these ideas were derided by both other men and women.

Gendered causes of conflict are interlinked with others

While the influence of gender emerges in all of the case studies, it is always linked to other drivers of conflict. Ideas of 'thwarted masculinities' usually involve social and economic factors such as unemployment, access to land or education, generational differences, internal displacement and the requirements of marriage customs. Ethnic and/or religious differences and nationalism also intersect with gender norms, as seen most particularly in the cases of Kosovo, Myanmar and Uganda. The use of gender stereotypes to invoke 'protective' action when women and girls have been abused tends to be linked to broader political motivations. While these interlinkages mean that it is not possible to find evidence that considers the relative significance

of gender, as compared to other factors, in each individual conflict, this does not lessen the importance of gender in fuelling violence and conflict.

5. References

- Bloom, M. (2010) 'Death Becomes Her: Women, occupation, and terrorist mobilization', in *Political Science & Politics*, 43(3) p. 445-450
- Bracewell, W. (2000) 'Rape in Kosovo: Masculinity and Serbian nationalism' in *Nations and Nationalism* 6 (4) p. 563-90
- Caprioli, M. and Boyer, M. (2001) 'Gender, violence and international crisis' in *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 45 (4) p. 503-518
- Cockburn, C. (2010) 'Gender Relations as Causal in Militarization and War', *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 12(2) p. 139–157
- Cohn, C. (2012) *Women and Wars*, Cambridge: Polity Press
- Combaz, E. (2013) *Gender dimensions of conflict drivers and stabilisation in eastern DRC* (GSDRC Helpdesk Research Report 970), GSDRC, University of Birmingham, <http://www.gsdrc.org/docs/open/hdq970.pdf>
- Conciliation Resources. (2019) *Navigating inclusion in peace processes*, Accord issue 28, <https://www.c-r.org/resources/accord-navigating-inclusion-peace-processes>
- Conciliation Resources. (2018) *Navigating inclusion into peace transitions: Beyond elite bargains*, Accord Spotlight, <http://www.politicalsettlements.org/publications-database/navigating-inclusion-in-peace-transitions-spotlight/>
- Conciliation Resources. (2015) *Gender and conflict analysis toolkit*, <https://www.c-r.org/resources/gender-and-conflict-analysis-toolkit-peacebuilders>
- Conciliation Resources. (2008) *Powers of persuasion: Incentives, sanctions and conditionality in peacemaking*, <https://www.c-r.org/resources/powers-persuasion-incentives-sanctions-and-conditionality-peacemaking>
- Conciliation Resources. (2004) *Alternatives to war: Colombia's peace processes*, Accord issue 14, <https://www.c-r.org/resources/alternatives-war-colombia-s-peace-processes>
- Connell, R. W. (1995) *Masculinities*, Cambridge: Polity Press
- Cunningham, K. (2003) 'Cross-regional trends in female terrorism' in *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 26 (3) p.171-195
- Dalrymple, S. (2010) *Common ground? Gendered assessment of the needs and concerns of Maoist Army combatants for rehabilitation and integration*. Saferworld
- Dean, R. (2001) *Imperial Brotherhood: Gender and the making of cold war foreign policy*. University of Massachusetts Press

- Dietrich, L. and Carter, S. (2017) *Gender and conflict analysis in ISIS affected communities of Iraq*, Oxfam. <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/rr-gender-conflict-isis-affected-iraq-300517-en.pdf>
- Dolan, C. (2011) 'Militarised, religious and neo-colonial: The triple bind confronting men in contemporary Uganda' in Cornwall, A., Edstrom, J. and Greig, A. (eds). *Men and development: Politicising masculinities*, London: Zed Books
- Dolan, C. (2002) 'Collapsing Masculinities and Weak States: A Case Study of Northern Uganda' in Cleaver, F. (ed). *Masculinities Matter! Men, Gender and Development*, London: Zed Books
- Duncanson, C. (2013) *Forces for Good? Military masculinities and peacebuilding in Afghanistan and Iraq*. Palgrave Macmillan UK
- Ekvall, A. (2019) *Gender inequality, homophobia and violence: The three pillars of patriarchal norms and attitudes, and their relations*. Ph.D. thesis, University of Antwerp
- El-Bushra, J. (2003) 'Fused in Combat: Gender Relations and Armed Conflict' in *Development in Practice* 13(2–3) p. 252–265
- El-Bushra, J. and Sahl, I. (2005) 'Cycles of Violence: Gender Relations and Armed Conflict', Acord, <http://www.acordinternational.org/silo/files/cycles-of-violence-gender-relations-and-armed-conflict.pdf>
- Eriksson Baaz, M. and Stern, M. (2017) 'Knowing Masculinities in Armed Conflict? Reflections from Research in the Democratic of Congo' in F.N. Aoláin, F., Cahn, N., Haynes, D. and Valji, N. (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of Gender and Conflict*, Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Herbert, S. (2014a) *Links between women's empowerment (or lack of) and outbreaks of violent conflict*, GSDRC Helpdesk report 1170. GSDRC, University of Birmingham, <http://www.gsdrc.org/go/display&type=Helpdesk&id=1170>
- Herbert, S. (2014b) *Links between gender-based violence and outbreaks of violent conflict*, GSDRC Helpdesk report 1169. GSDRC, University of Birmingham, <http://www.gsdrc.org/go/display&type=Helpdesk&id=1169>
- Hudson, V., Caprioli, M., Ballif-Spanvill, B., McDermott, R. and Emmett, C. (2009) 'The heart of the matter: The security of women and the security of states' in *International Security*, 33(3) p. 7-45
- Jackson, R., Breen Smyth, M., Gunning, J. and Jarvis, L. (2011) *Terrorism: A Critical Introduction*, Palgrave Macmillan
- Mkutu, K.A. (2008) 'Uganda: Pastoral Conflict & Gender Relations' in *Review of African Political Economy*, 35(116) p. 237-254
- Mootz, J., Stabb, S. and Mollen, D. (2017) 'Gender-Based Violence and Armed Conflict: A Community-Informed Socioecological Conceptual Model from Northeastern Uganda' in *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 41(3) p. 368-388
- Munn, J. (2008) 'National myths and the creation of heroes' in Parpart, J. and Zalewski, M. (eds). *Rethinking the 'man' question: Sex, gender and violence in international relations*. London: Zed Books

- Naujoks, J. and Ko, M. (2018a) *Pulling the strings: Masculinities, gender and social conflict in Myanmar*, International Alert, <https://www.international-alert.org/publications/pulling-the-strings-masculinities-gender-social-conflict-myanmar>
- Naujoks, J. and Ko, M. (2018b) *Behind the masks: Masculinities, gender, peace and security in Myanmar*, International Alert, <https://www.international-alert.org/publications/behind-the-masks-masculinities-gender-peace-security-myanmar>
- Naujoks, J. and Ko, M. (2018c) *Mandating men: Understanding masculinities and engaging men for gender equality and peacebuilding in Myanmar*. International Alert, <https://www.international-alert.org/publications/mandating-men-masculinities-peacebuilding-gender-equality-myanmar>
- Okiror, S. (2016) *How the LRA still haunts northern Uganda*, <http://www.irinnews.org/analysis/2016/02/17/how-lra-still-haunts-northern-uganda>
- Peterson, V. (2008) 'New wars and gendered economies' in *Feminist Review* 88 (1) p.7-20
- Stites, E. (2013) 'A Struggle for Rites: Masculinity, Violence and Livelihoods in Karamoja, Uganda' in Tripp, A. Ferree, M. and Ewig, C. (eds) *Gender, Violence, and Human Security: Critical Feminist Perspectives*, New York: New York University Press
- Strachan, A. and Haider, H. (2015) *Gender and conflict: Topic guide*, GSDRC, University of Birmingham, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a089a1ed915d3cfd00034c/gender_conflict.pdf
- Tambiah, Y. (2005) 'Turncoat Bodies: Sexuality and Sex Work under Militarization in Sri Lanka' in *Gender and Society* 19(2) p. 243-261
- Theidon, K. (2009) 'Reconstructing masculinities: The disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of former combatants in Colombia' in *Human Rights Quarterly* 31 (1) p1-34
- Wright, H. (2014) *Masculinities, Conflict and Peacebuilding: Perspectives on men through a gender lens*, London: Saferworld, <https://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/publications/862-masculinities-conflict-and-peacebuilding-perspectives-on-men-through-a-gender-lens>

Acknowledgements

We thank the following experts who voluntarily provided suggestions for relevant literature or other advice to the author to support the preparation of this report. The content of the report does not necessarily reflect the opinions of any of the experts consulted.

Åsa Ekvall, Consultant and Dutch National Committee of UN Women

Sophia Close, Senior Adviser, Gender and Peacebuilding, Conciliation Resources

Hannah Wright, Doctoral Researcher, London School of Economics and Political Science

Claire Duncanson, Senior Lecturer in International Relations, University of Edinburgh

Nina Wilén, Research Director, Egmont Institute for International Relations

Tam O'Neil, Care International

Suggested citation

Birchall, J. (2019). *Gender as a causal factor in conflict*. K4D Helpdesk Report 549. Brighton, UK: Institute of Development Studies.

About this report

This report is based on six days of desk-based research. The K4D research helpdesk provides rapid syntheses of a selection of recent relevant literature and international expert thinking in response to specific questions relating to international development. For any enquiries, contact helpdesk@k4d.info.

K4D services are provided by a consortium of leading organisations working in international development, led by the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), with Education Development Trust, Itad, University of Leeds Nuffield Centre for International Health and Development, Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine (LSTM), University of Birmingham International Development Department (IDD) and the University of Manchester Humanitarian and Conflict Response Institute (HCRI).

This report was prepared for the UK Government's Department for International Development (DFID) and its partners in support of pro-poor programmes. It is licensed for non-commercial purposes only. K4D cannot be held responsible for errors or any consequences arising from the use of information contained in this report. Any views and opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect those of DFID, K4D or any other contributing organisation. © DFID - Crown copyright 2019.

