

# Notes on Gender Injustice in Fragile and Conflict Contexts<sup>1</sup>

## International Level

International Community, Geopolitical sphere, UN, HR mechanism, transnational systems

## National level

State institutions, government, democracy procedures

## Society

Diversity, Gendered norms, Power, Organisations and movements, Patriarchy, political Parties and networks, Minorities

Risk of Fragile States and Fragility discourse is to isolate the issue of (strong) state institutions, from international developments and processes **and** from the social and cultural context/community:

To guarantee and protect human rights for everybody it is important that state institutions are functioning, transparent and accountable.

Rules for political power / protection against abuse and authoritarian regimes:

- Independent Justice System
- Legislation and legitimate legislative power
- Law enforcement
- Representation and participation

Accountability is in the first place national, government versus the governed.

Society is diverse: different social position and power of individuals and groups, diversity, power, movements, networks;

- \* how do these influence legislation and control enforcement?
- \* (how) are different voices and interests included?
- \* is political power controlled and open?

= thinking democracy and separation of power. Relation with geopolitics, international community  
[Not only institutions]

***Necessary to look how social inequality works and is eventually reinforced, to prevent that we are blind for the influence in the institutions and risk factors for violent conflicts.***

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<sup>1</sup> Only personal notes for short introduction, not well thought and organised arguments. For personal use only.

Although human and women rights are accepted and basis of UN and states, this is unfortunately more often than not merely discourse, as too often 'other priorities' prevail at the cost of rights and equality. This is not only a political problem, but a risk factor for violent conflicts.

According to research<sup>2</sup>

### ***I. Correlation between Domestic Violence and violent conflict:***

Domestic Violence an important factor in the level of the use of violence in disputes/conflicts in the wider society, through:

- \* modelling: children witness violence and learn it as being a way to settle disputes; sons of violent fathers perpetuate violence.
- \* immediate satisfaction: when violent behaviour results in fulfilling the needs of the perpetrators (mostly men): dominance, sex, attention, etc,
- \* existence of male bonded groups: boys playing with boys reinforce bonds (not found in mixed groups and girls); early start for viewing women as others. Basis for adult male groups and dominance. boy schools, coffeehouses, gangs, madrassa's, armed groups, army.

In a patriarchal society and with existing impunity (including social acceptance) this (GB) violence reinforces the cultural and social hierarchies and differentiated norms for men and women -> reinforcing loops makes it a systemic problem.

Impunity and relative rate of violence is a predictor for aggressive behaviour, against women and generally in the community.

—> Violence at different levels is related, impunity for GBV is a low barrier for antisocial violence and use of violence in conflicts, at all levels.

State security rest in the first place on women's security.

1. *Education is key. working with young boys / work on violent masculinities*
2. *Breaking the link between political power and the use of physical power (violence). Challenge influence of vertical political networks, nepotism and corruption.*

**II.** Some scholars believe there is a correlation between some ***measures that ameliorated gender inequality and decreasing violent patriarchy and the rise of democracy.*** Levels of VAW/GBV are more predictive for state security and peacefulness than levels of procedural democracy.

—> **HYPOTHESIS**

***In states where democracy rose from within through the amelioration of gender inequality, we should find greater state security; but where democracy is imposed or veneered over over systems where male-female relations did not undergo fundamental transformation, we should not find as significant differences in state security and peacefulness.***

1. *Gender equality as a road to peaceful societies.*
2. *Challenge the power inequality between men and women.*

### ***III. Women and the State***

Starting with studies in 70-ies (WID) quantitative research show a positive correlation between role of women in economy and GDP and health rates.

Negative correlation between women's role and corruption

Comparing data is confirming the hypothesis that the higher the level of gender inequality within a state, the greater the likelihood that the state will experience internal conflict.

Discrimination and exclusion of (ethnic) minorities and nationalism: not gender neutral. Women are mostly seen as the defenders of or symbol of the groups identity, are supposed to be loyal.

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<sup>2</sup> See for instance: [https://www.belfercenter.org/sites/default/files/files/publication/IS3303\\_pp007-045.pdf](https://www.belfercenter.org/sites/default/files/files/publication/IS3303_pp007-045.pdf)

Women categorised as an internal in/out group according to their loyalty/own agenda. Women's rights = betrayal = a threat

A worldview that is based on prejudices against women or other 'minorities', translates into a level of global intolerance and higher levels of bellicosity against those (states) not perceived as equal.

—> *Importance of intersectionality - local context and conflict analysis*

—> *Importance of movements / empowerment, for the own agendas*

### **Some citations and notes:**

'Males are designated protector, females (and young) as protected. At the same time, perversely, males are cast as wielders of the means of coercion, women as 'natural victims. ***In such a gender order, war can seem the fulfilment of gendered destinies***'. (Cynthia Cockburn)

'What keeps the world militarised is the fear of men to be called feminine'. (Cynthia Enloe)

'The world of the protected (women and girls) is limited. Even strong autonomous women limit the space of their daughters, which is about parenting'. (Cynthia Enloe)

Need to study the position of women in army and other armed groups. Difficulty to reconcile with 'peaceful women'. Position in the army / how media write about it (Balkan war: 'love towards family, sacrifice, ...')

Pitfall of victimising certain female bodies over others (Demonising only Serb rapists delegitimised raped Serbian women). (Dubravka Zarkov).

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Culture and religion can be problematic but are also ground for empowerment, change, solidarity and strength. Fundamentalist movements do affect the believers first, and in the frontline those that want change, women and men activists that challenge interpretation and power.

'Sisters in Islam' and Musawah, support women to engage in discussion with religious leaders in Koran interpretation. ([www.musawah.org](http://www.musawah.org)) as well as American Network for Catholic Women for the Right to Decide (<http://www.catholicsforchoice.org> and <http://catolicas.org.ar/carta-de-principios-de-la-red-latinoamericana-de-catolicas-por-el-derecho-a-decidir/>)

Fundamentalist movements are in the first place political, using religion as a platform. ([https://www.awid.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/exposed - ten myths about religious fundamentalisms.pdf](https://www.awid.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/exposed_-_ten_myths_about_religious_fundamentalisms.pdf))

Christian community groups in Brasil (based on non-violent action) discovered that the church is a factor in oppression and took action, without necessarily losing their faith. MST (Landless Farmers Movement), a.o., was one of the spin-offs of this movement)

Important keeping **the link between cultural and structural violence** in the analysis, to understand contextualised causes and factors for conflict and inequality and opportunities for change. It is not enough to raise awareness (mostly of only women) as an outsider, this can even be a risk for fuelling conflict and inequality and it could disempower women and men. Inequality is in the heart of a community, and change will have to happen in that heart. Empowerment is an important tool for people to engage in challenging inequality, not an endgoal. As is support for movements and solidarity.

### **Structural Violence:**

was defined by Johan Galtung, as the systematic ways in which a regime or group prevents individuals from achieving their full potential. It inhibits individuals and groups to decide over their own lives. Institutionalised exclusion and racism and gender inequality are examples of this. 'pervasive and systematic exploitation / discrimination makes open violence in the public sphere unnecessary' or acceptable.

1. exploitation, based on division of labor and benefits are unequally distributed.
2. control over consciousness of exploited → acquiescence (berusting, instemming) (*Link to cultural violence*) *Socialisation and role of violence*
3. fragmentation (the exploited and marginalised are isolated) barriers for own networks and groups.
4. marginalisation, creating the own rules for exploiters ('natural')

Visible and invisible/hidden in institutions (s.a laws, human resources, marriage, ...)

### **Cultural Violence**

means that aspects of culture are used to legitimize or justify direct or structural violence (through patriarchy (the primary basis), traditions, symbols, language, science, religion, ideology, interpretation of history). Or culture is used to create or reinforce divisions/inequality.

'any reforms of the cultural distribution of of the power between men and women will be viewed as a threat to nationalist efforts to protect or unify the community' (Nira Yuval-Davis)

Cultural violence can make violence an accepted or the 'just' action.

### **Some definitions:**

***A conflict is an interaction between 2 or more parties, and at least one of these parties experience differences in perception, feeling, thinking, wishing and that party feels limited by the other. (F.Glasl)***

**Gender** refers to the array of socially constructed roles and relationships, personality traits, attitudes, behaviours, values, relative power and influence that society ascribes to the two sexes on a differential basis.

**Gender equality:** the concept that all human beings, both men and women, are free to develop their personal abilities and make choices without the limitations set by stereotypes, rigid gender roles, or prejudices.

**Gender Equity** means fairness of treatment for women and men, according to their respective needs. This may include equal treatment or treatment that is different but considered equivalent in terms of rights, benefits, obligations and opportunities.

**Empowerment** "is the process of enhancing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes.

**Rule of Law** the principle that all people and institutions are subject to and accountable to law that is fairly applied and enforced; the principle of government by law.

1. Accountability
2. Open government
3. Just laws
4. Impartial dispute settlement

**Intersectionality:** (Kruispuntdenken) is

"The interconnected nature of social categorisations (identities) such as race, class, and gender, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage"

'Concentratie op telkens één set van processen doet geen recht aan de werkelijkheid. Gender en etniciteit co-construeren elkaar, zijn gelijktijdig werkzaam. Gender is altijd a; van ethische betekenis en etniciteit is al gendered.' (Gloria Wekker)