Workshop 12

*Gendering the Transnational in Conflict, Migration and Post-conflict Reconstruction: From the Middle East to Europe*

directed by

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Workshop abstract

This proposed workshop represents an innovative forum for the discussion of the interrelationships between gender and transnationalism in the context of conflict, migration and post-conflict (re)construction with respect to the Middle East and Europe. The importance of mainstreaming gender in post-conflict reconstruction and peace-building has been highlighted by various international forums, as well as women’s groups. Simultaneously, studies of conflict and post-conflict contexts emphasise the role of diasporic and migrant communities in peace-building and reconstruction within their countries of origin.

The workshop papers will contribute to addressing the following questions in relation to gender, transnationalism, conflict, migration and post-conflict situations: To what extent are women becoming involved in transnational activities with respect to post-conflict reconstruction and peace-building in their countries of origin? Does women’s activism differ from men’s activism in this respect? What is the role of migrant/diasporic communities versus those living in zones of conflict with regard to this activism? What is the role of European governments and transnational forums, such as the UN, in promoting gender equality in the context of post-conflict reconstruction, beyond
resolutions of support? How successful is ‘gender-mainstreaming’ with regard to European and transnational agency policies towards conflict-torn societies in the Middle East?

The aim of this workshop is to promote original research on gender and transnationalism. Towards this end, the workshop directors invite papers from different disciplinary backgrounds based on theoretically-informed and empirically-grounded research of single-country case studies or comparative cases.

Workshop description

Introduction

The significance of mainstreaming gender in post-conflict reconstruction and peace-building has been highlighted by UN Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security and the Athens Forum (2003) on Gender, Peace and Foreign Policy in the EU. Simultaneously, studies of conflict and post-conflict contexts emphasise the role of diasporic and migrant communities in peace-building and reconstruction within their countries of origin. This proposed workshop represents an innovative forum for the discussion of the interrelationships between these two areas—gender and transnationalism—in the context of conflict, migration and post-conflict (re)construction with respect to the Middle East and Europe.

Aims and Objectives of the Workshop

The aim of this workshop is to promote original and innovative research that addresses the question, ‘to what extent are women and men participating in transnational activities with regard to peace-building and post-conflict reconstruction and with what consequences’? From this research, we hope to inform new policy considerations and academic debates on this highly topical issue. For the purpose of this workshop, conflict not only includes wars between nation states, but also various degrees of ethnic/religious violence, including insurgencies and occupation (this would include Egypt, Iraq, Israel/Palestine and Sudan). Meanwhile, post-conflict refers not only to those countries that have recently ended hostilities but those countries that are still recovering from or seeking to avoid a relapse of conflict (such as, Algeria and Lebanon). Towards this end, we seek to bring together a variety of scholarly papers from different disciplines, informed by different methodological approaches and with different country foci. The output of this workshop will be a special edition of one of the following journals: International Feminist Journal of Politics, Third World Quarterly, Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies or Peace and Conflict Studies.

This workshop builds on two significant strands of academic literature, which have grown in the recent past: the gendered nature of conflict and post-conflict reconstruction; and diasporic mobilization during conflict and reconstruction. The workshop will bring together the insights and research questions from these two strands in order to examine the gendered transnational dimensions of conflict, migration and reconstruction.

The Gendered Nature of Conflict and Post-conflict Reconstruction

The ability of women and men to participate in peace-building, post-conflict reconstruction and other political processes depends upon their experiences of conflict situations. The gendered nature of nationalist ideologies and national and state processes is central to understanding the gender-specific
ways in which violence and conflict impact upon women and men (Giles & Hyndman, 2004). Gender roles may become ‘re-traditionalised’ as a result of conflict. As the biological and cultural reproducers of the community, women’s bodies and identities become the battlefields for both sides of the conflict (Al-Ali, 2007; Peteet, 1991; Sharoni, 1995; Yuval-Davis, 1997: 66–67). Meanwhile, men are frequently equated with the worlds of arms and glory, and are enjoined to be the ‘protectors’ of their ‘womenandchildren’ (Cockburn, 2002).

On the other hand, war opens up opportunities for transforming gender roles and relations (Meintjes, Pillay & Turshen, 2002; Sharoni, 1995). In the absence of male relatives, women may become workers, heads of households, community leaders and peace-makers (Sharoni, 1995). Simultaneously, men may reject the ‘hegemonic’, militarized notions of masculinity, opening spaces for peace and reconciliation (Connell, 1995, 2002). In other words, the ways in which women and men participate and to what degree they participate is shaped by their experiences and responses to dominant gender roles, identities and relations. Consequently, understanding women and men’s activism in the post-conflict context necessitates an understanding of the impact of conflict situations on different individuals.

Gendering Diasporic Mobilization during Conflict and Reconstruction

War and post-conflict reconstruction are transnational projects that challenge the logic of contained conflict and post-war development. By engaging in economic, social, cultural and political activities that span across national boundaries, members of diasporas might contribute to accelerating or prolonging war and conflict as well as creating new possibilities and opportunities for peace-making and reconstruction. Although transnational migration as a process that links migrants to their countries of origin has always existed (Glick-Schiller, 1999; Vertovec, 2001), the nature and quality of transnational ties have undergone significant changes in recent time due to processes of globalisation.

Yet war gives rise to refugees whose transnational experiences and options are narrowly channelled by economic, social, cultural and legal parameters of specific nation-states. In particular, gender regimes (Connell, 1987) shape the involvement of women and men within trans/national projects, including those pertaining to post-conflict (re)construction (Massey, 1994:149). Indeed, migrant women and men enjoy qualitatively distinct experiences of membership in the country of immigration, as well as embodying different experiences of citizenship in their countries of origin, particularly when it comes to Middle Eastern countries (see Kandiyoti, 1991; Charrad, 1990). Consequently, it is necessary to understand to what degree and in what cases diasporic mobilisation is helped or hindered and with what effect.

The Role of the International Community

The international community, including specific national governments, have increasingly supported the idea of "gender mainstreaming" in post-conflict reconstruction and peace-building (for example, UN Resolution 1325/2000). However, a stated commitment to promoting women’s participation does not guarantee that women are empowered to participate. Indeed, the case of Iraq demonstrates that gender concerns may be sacrificed to ‘greater priorities’—namely, security and the political agendas of different actors (Pratt, 2005). It is necessary to examine how and when gender-sensitive policies are pursued in post-conflict situations and with what results for women and for men.
Bibliography


Potential participants

We are concerned to attract scholars from different countries at various stages of their academic careers (from Ph.D. students to established professors) who are engaged in original research with regards to the theme of the workshop. In addition, we also welcome researchers working within appropriate non-governmental, governmental and multi-lateral agencies, as well as independent scholars. In particular, we wish to include a broad representation of researchers from inside and outside the Middle East region. In this way, we hope to create an arena for the cross-fertilisation and evolution of new thinking on the theme of gender, transnationalism, conflict, migration and post-conflict reconstruction.

Types of papers

The workshop directors invite papers from different disciplinary backgrounds based on original, theoretically-informed, empirical research of single-country or comparative case studies. Case studies may focus on transnational fields that link individuals/groups/governments within any of the countries of the Middle East and North Africa (broadly defined) with those within Europe. These transnational fields should be formed in the context of conflict/post-conflict reconstruction or should aim to contribute to post-conflict reconstruction in a Middle Eastern country. Research generated by both qualitative and quantitative methods is welcomed. It is not essential that papers make theoretical innovations, although this would be very much welcomed.

The workshop papers will contribute to addressing the following questions in order to understand how gender shapes transnational activism and how transnational activism shapes gender with regards to (post)conflict situations:

- To what extent are women becoming involved in transnational activities with respect to post-conflict reconstruction and peace-building in their countries of origin?
- Does women’s activism differ from men’s activism in this respect?
- How do other factors, such as ethnicity, religion, class, political beliefs and/or national context shape transnational activism?
• What is the role of migrant/diasporic communities versus those living in zones of (post)conflict with regard to this activism?
• What is the role of European governments and transnational forums, such as the UN, in promoting gender equality in the context of post-conflict reconstruction, beyond resolutions of support?
• How successful is ‘gender-mainstreaming’ with regard to European and transnational agency policies towards conflict-torn societies in the Middle East?

Directors’ individual paper abstracts

Developing Theoretical Tools, Methodologies and Political Frameworks

Nadje Al-Ali and Nicola Pratt

In this proposed joint paper, we will tackle some of the theoretical and political underpinnings related to debates around reconstruction, diaspora mobilization and citizenship by focusing on the role of women and gender in political transition. Combining the theoretical concepts and methods of political science, international relations, social anthropology and women/gender studies we aim at contributing to an interdisciplinary as well as a gendered approach to reconstruction and post-conflict political transition. We will address the question of the significance of gender in understanding processes related to reconstruction and political transition. It is our argument that we have to move beyond a simple ‘add women and stir’ approach, but actually gender our perspectives and approaches to include power relationships, structures as well as evolving and changing notions of femininity as masculinity.

Our theoretical and methodological stipulations are mainly based on our ongoing research on the role of women and gender in political transition in Iraq. However, we also base our theoretical and methodological framework on other empirical case studies generated in the MENA region and beyond. Comparisons with case studies from Africa and the Balkans will inform our focus on the region and widen the parameters of the debate. Although we are mainly interested in the specificities pertaining to post-conflict reconstruction and gender in the MENA region, we also want to explore parallels with other regions and post-conflict settings. Methodologically, we are proposing multi-sited, inter- and cross-disciplinary approaches, combining qualitative and quantitative research methods.

Gender Policies and Iraqi Women Activists in Post-2003 Iraq

Nadje Al-Ali and Nicola Pratt

This paper is based on a larger project in which we jointly explore the role of women and gender in political transition in Iraq. In this second proposed paper, we will not only explore policies, programmes and legal frameworks, such as the constitution, that directly address Iraqi women and gender relations but will also consider a whole range of measures and actions pursued by the international community, and the US in particular, that impact upon gender ideologies & relations.
These policies and measures, as we will argue, contribute to a reproduction of authoritarian political culture, violence and increased gender inequalities. In this respect, we will attempt to challenge the narrow view of mainstream approaches that ignore the gendered dimensions of the reconstruction process as a whole and that see this process as distinct and isolated from concurrent political and social processes. Data will be gathered from official press releases, relevant agency websites and official reports, in addition to media reports. These sources will be supplemented by interviews with individuals working in/with relevant agencies involved in reconstruction in Iraq.

We will also explore the role of women and gender in post-conflict political processes in Iraq by focusing on transnational networks in which Iraqi women, both inside and outside Iraq, participate. Based on new and innovative empirical data obtained through fieldwork in the UK, US and Jordan, we will first map out the scope of activities in term of types of organizations, groups and networks (i.e. independent, linked to political parties, or religious/ethnic communities), and secondly analyse the various ways gender impacts on Iraqi women’s political activism and more general involvement in reconstruction processes. Significant in this regards is the question of impediments and obstacles to a greater involvement of women, which will lead to a discussion of prevailing gender ideologies and relations both within Iraqi diasporic communities and specific host countries as well as inside Iraq itself.