

# ‘Making Friends with the Beast?’

## Reflections on the Women, Peace and Security Agenda

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*UN Res. 1325 is a revolutionary transformation of rhetoric regarding issues of women, peace, and security. In the last dozen years, there has been a proliferation of debates about its successes and its failures. Should its limitations be understood as failures in implementation? Or should the concepts of women, gender, and violence which frame the resolution be critically challenged?*

At a recent reception, a friend at the Danish Institute for Human Rights was taking leave of her colleagues to start a new position at the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. She spoke of her feelings about moving to the Ministry from the Institute, where she had worked for fifteen years as an expert on human rights, and recalled an experience from her girlhood. As any girl who rides horses knows, she related, there was always the big beast which only the riding instructor had permission to ride. Then the day came when she too was allowed to take out the big horse. She found that he liked her carrots and was actually a nice guy. In fact, she could even begin to make friends with the beast – a useful image for her as she was taking up her new position at the Ministry.

It struck me that this image is also useful in conveying some of the dilemmas faced by feminists, both NGO activists and academic feminists, in assessing advances made within the United Nations system

with regard to the agenda known as Women, Peace and Security. Is it friend or foe? On the one hand, Security Council Resolution 1325, adopted on October 31, 2000, represents a revolutionary transformation of rhetoric that is the result of relentless labor by the NGOs responsible for the groundwork. It is remarkable to imagine the men of the Security Council putting into their mouths the language underscoring the importance of mainstreaming a gender perspective and the importance of the representation, participation, and protection of women from rape and other forms of sexual abuse (Resolution 1325 of 2000), language noting women's empowerment in peacemaking processes (Resolution 1889 of 2009) and language reaffirming the need to end impunity and to implement a policy of zero tolerance of sexual exploitation and abuse (Resolution 1820 of 2008) (Kuehnast, de Jonge Oudraat, and Hernes 2011: 131-155).<sup>1</sup> With this language ringing in our ears, it seems that the limitations of the Women, Peace, and Security agenda should be understood as lying not with its concepts but with its implementation, despite the assiduous efforts of NGOs around the world to translate Resolution 1325 out of 'UN language' into more than a hundred, more accessible languages<sup>2</sup> (Cohn 2004: 7).

On the other hand, many academic feminists have claimed that the resolutions are organized around concepts of gender and violence that falsely fix bodies into biologically determined sexual differences (Shepherd 2008: 106). With the focus on 'women as peacemakers', the Women, Peace and Security agenda leaves the dominant political and epistemological frameworks about gender and security untouched, despite its appearance of serving more progressive goals. Moreover, the dynamics of gender in security relations cannot be separated from the workings of economic, political or military institutions. As Carol Cohn argues, even if peaceable

women held peace talks, would it make a difference if the global arms trade continued to expand, with 80% of the profits going to the five permanent members of the Security Council, if international financial institutions foreclose the possibility of creating a citizenry free enough from want that they can become democratically empowered, if security continues to be understood in terms of state security with huge standing armies, and if the role of gender regimes in relation to these factors remains invisible (Cohn 2004: 18)?

From this brief summary, it appears that NGO activists have been better at making friends with the beast than many academic feminists. (However, the former also pay a price for this friendship, as NGO activists in the Working Group on Women, Peace and Security have changed their ways of speaking and thinking to make their activities and political agenda more attractive to UN policy-shaping processes (Cohn 2004:8).) But when academic feminists challenge the epistemological and political frameworks of the Women, Peace and Security agenda, one can argue that they also are making friends with the beast by carrying out the role of the gadfly.<sup>3</sup> In pointing out problematic assumptions, gaps and blind spots in knowledge, and local variations, academic feminists contest what counts as knowledge about gender and violence.

After providing some background to the Women, Peace and Security agenda, I will examine some key assumptions about the concepts of women, gender, and violence embedded in Resolution 1325, which is a centerpiece of this agenda. In doing so, I draw on debates in international relations, gender mainstreaming,<sup>4</sup> and philosophical discussions of violence. As debates amongst academic feminists illustrate, there is a 'theory gap' between researchers' understanding of gender and violence and the way these terms are used in this security agenda. Many academic feminists are highly critical of the way in which gender is

treated in Resolution 1325 as if it were a characterization of pre-existing, natural differences belonging to the sexes (or more accurately, belonging to the one sex that is treated as having a sex). Instead of treating concepts of gender and violence as if they were static properties for possession or use, it is crucial to understand them as dynamic processes. Doing so enables one to move away from a framework of interpretation that treats violence as acts committed against individuals because of their sexuality and gender, and towards a broader understanding of how violence is productive of gendered subjectivities and bodies, as well as how violence is immanent in gendered norms. In doing so, one challenges the asymmetry in understandings of gender and violence in the Women, Peace and Security agenda, while developing the ambiguity implicit in these relations, which allows for more complex understandings of the dynamics of gender and violence.

#### BACKGROUND TO THE WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY AGENDA

Resolution 1325 marks the first time that the Security Council directly addressed the issue of women in armed conflict. It was also the first time that gender has been mainstreamed in relation to armed conflict and security, rather than in terms of development and human rights issues (Cohn 2004: 2). It has been supplemented by subsequent Resolutions 1820, 1888, 1889 and 1960. Resolution 1325 calls on the UN and member states to address abuses against women during conflicts, including sexual and gender-based violence; to protect displaced women; to train peacekeepers and security forces in gender awareness; to rebuild institutions that provide essential services to women; and to support women's organizational efforts in conflict prevention and peacemaking (Willet 2010: 142). Its documentary heritage includes previous resolutions

relating to the protection of children (also in armed conflict), as well as the security needs of women, children and the elderly in refugee camps (Shepherd 2008: 108).

The resolution is the result of the bold work of NGOs concerned with women and war and their determination to influence 'the most powerful global governance institution in the area of international peace and security' (Cohn 2004: 3). Its genesis can be traced back to the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action's chapter on women and armed conflict, and its review in *Beijing* +5. In March 2000, the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace, and Security was formed to press for a resolution. Its founding members were the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, Amnesty International, International Alert, the Hague Appeal for Peace, the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children and the Women's Caucus for Gender Justice. The NGOs prepared the entire groundwork for the resolution, including reviewing every UN document for relevance to the WPS agenda, providing a compendium of 'agreed language' and bringing women from conflict zones to address the Security Council. The working group self-consciously positioned themselves as helpers rather than adversaries of the Council. NGOs have continued to make Resolution 1325 a living document by making it known to grassroots women's organizations in conflict zones, by translating it widely and by providing national and international actors with timely information, so they could no longer say 'We had no way of knowing.' In this way, although the Resolution addresses actors within the UN system and its member states, the NGOs have successfully used it 'on the ground' for consciousness-raising, for gaining political influence and for pressing for accountability (Cohn 2004: 4-6).

As Carol Cohn notes, the Working Group's members defined themselves

neither as ‘anti-war’ nor as feminist. They shared divergent conceptual frameworks, but were generally cautious of falling into the ‘too political’ category. In this way, they narrowed the realm of analysis of war, militarism, and armed violence to focus on two issues: 1) prising women from the victim category that Cynthia Enloe has dubbed ‘womenandchildren’; and 2) focusing on women’s ‘agency’, which quickly became translated into ‘women as peacemakers’ (Cohn 2004: 12-13). Despite the achievements of the NGOs in getting the issues on the agenda of international security, their framing remains mired in the imagined polarities of masculine/feminine, aggressive/peaceful, protector/protected that feminists working in war studies, international relations, and other related fields have persistently challenged.

#### THE CONCEPT OF WOMEN IN THE WOMEN, PEACE, AND SECURITY AGENDA

In a 1999 essay, the feminist legal theorist Catharine A. MacKinnon asks, “Are Women Human?” And she answers,

If women were human, would we be a cash crop shipped from Thailand in containers into New York’s brothels? Would we be sexual and reproductive slaves? ...Would our genitals be sliced out to ‘cleanse’ us (our body parts are dirt?), to control us, to mark us and define our cultures? ...Would we be beaten nearly to death, and to death, by men with whom we are close? Would we be sexually molested in our families? Would we be raped in genocide to terrorize and eject and destroy our ethnic communities, and raped again in that undeclared war that goes on every day in every country in the world in what is called peacetime?... Being a woman is ‘not yet a name for a way of being human’... Women need full human status in social reality. For this, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights must see the ways women

distinctively are deprived of human rights as a deprivation of humanity. (MacKinnon 2006: 41-43)

MacKinnon’s powerful rhetoric also underlines one of the paradoxes of the Women, Peace and Security agenda. On the one hand, women’s human rights should be protected by all UN documents. On the other hand, Resolution 1325 recognizes the need to protect ‘the special needs and human rights of women and children in conflict situations’ and to take account of ‘gender considerations and the rights of women...’ (Kuehnast 2011: 132, 134). Many feminists recognize the paradox that, as Linda Zerilli formulates it, the universal is always attached ‘to some particular body which cannot be fully divested of its particularity,’ hence can never be ‘sexually indifferent.’ And yet the claims ‘to sexual difference cannot be made in the absence of a universal reference...’ (Zerilli 1998: 16). Echoing this theoretical understanding, feminist scholars acknowledge that the particular situations, threats, and insecurities generated by the sexual differentiation of human lives are central to peace and security. But they object to the *ways* in which Resolution 1325 identifies sexual difference with women, vulnerability, maternalism, and peacemaking. In doing so, the document does not merely mirror qualities perceived as feminine and masculine, but rather *produces* certain types of femininities and masculinities (Väyrynen 2004: 140). In portraying these categories as if they were representations of pre-existing qualities, this approach naturalizes them. When gender attributions appear as necessary rather than contingent, as unchanging rather than fluid, there are also political effects. As Cynthia Cockburn has noted more generally about essentialism, ‘It is a dangerous political force, designed to shore up differences and inequalities, to sustain dominations’ (Cockburn 1998: 13).<sup>5</sup>

One of the weaknesses of Resolution 1325 is that, although it acknowledges that sexual difference is significant for war, it implies that only women are vulnerable as sexed beings in war. In this way, it reiterates the asymmetry between the sexes that Simone de Beauvoir diagnosed in *The Second Sex* in 1949, the year after the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: ‘The term *masculine* and *feminine* are used symmetrically only as a matter of form, as on legal papers. In actuality the relation of the two sexes is not quite like that of two electrical poles, for man represents both the positive and the neutral ... whereas woman represents only the negative, defined by limiting criteria, without reciprocity’ (Beauvoir 1952/1974: xvii-xviii). The Resolution fails to note that men too are vulnerable as sexed beings in war, and in fact nowhere does the resolution explicitly refer to men. As Shepherd notes, ‘man’ is very much the absent presence. ‘He’, however, is represented, embodying the subject of the United Nations Secretary-General’ (Shepherd 2008: 121).

Although men are never specifically mentioned in the Resolution, the emphasis on training peacekeeping personnel on the ‘special needs and human rights of women and children’ indicates an assumption in the Resolution that peacekeepers are men who require such special training. Assuming that peacekeepers are men is part of the logic of masculine protection in which those who protect (police, military, peacekeepers, or more generally the protectionist state) provide protection ‘in exchange for loyalty and submission’ (Young 2007: 303-4). This silent assumption about peacekeepers bypasses a major discussion amongst researchers about multiple masculinities, the role of hegemonic forms of masculinity, and the implications of patterns of masculinity for training democratic gender relations for peace (Connell 2003: 35-39). The logic of masculine protection also makes invisible the harm

done to men as civilians under armed conflict. For example, Resolution 1325 expresses a concern that civilians, ‘particularly women and children’, account for the vast majority of those adversely affected by armed conflict (Kuehnast 2011: 131). But, as with the massacre in Srebrenica in July 1995, when between 7000-8000 men and boys were murdered, there are many cases in which ‘the most systematic and severe atrocities and abuse were inflicted disproportionately or overwhelmingly upon noncombatant men’ (Jones 2004: 1).

Whereas men are the absent present that frames the logic of security, women are posited as fully identified with the phrase ‘women and children’. When Cynthia Enloe began writing this phrase as ‘women-andchildren’, she highlighted the way in which the binary of protector/protected positions women as vulnerable. This identification of vulnerability with women’s role as mothers is apparent in the language of the Security Council. As Charli Carpenter has noted, in the four years from 1999 to 2003, the Security Council used the phrase ‘women and children’ 163 times, ‘women as combatants’ six times, and ‘men as vulnerable’ once (cited in Puechguirbal 2010: 172). And indeed, women are vulnerable as mothers when they see their children murdered in front of their eyes, or their daughters raped, or when they themselves are forcibly raped by their sons, or when they are raped by neighbours or enemy combatants, or when they are raped and forcibly impregnated. In fact, the relational violence done to *families* is central to genocide (Joeden-Forgey 2010: 13). However, women also are harmed in other ways during conflict, including in relation to their access to property and other economic resources. Violent upheavals often involve relocation, resulting in dramatic losses economically for women. Margaret Urban Walker notes that there is the possibility that ‘women’s loss of livelihood, land, and wealth may be eclipsed by

the more shocking facts of mass rape, sexualized torture and mutilation, and sexual enslavement.' And she argues for the need to understand "the bidirectional relationships between sexual abuse and material dispossession of women" (Walker 2009: 40-41).

Thus, Resolution 1325 fails really to prise women from the 'womenandchildren' unit, and it fails to prise children from this unit as well. In doing so, it risks identifying children's rights with the rights of their mothers. With respect to the mass rapes, enforced impregnation, and enforced maternity in Bosnia during the wars in the 1990s, this identification resulted in an occlusion of children's rights. Carpenter argues that, when children who are born of rape ('birth-by-forced-maternity') are forcibly adopted out of their mother's community, they themselves are victims of genocide committed by the victim community itself (Carpenter 2000: 444).

One of the achievements of the Women, Peace, and Security agenda is the focus on women's agency, in contrast to the earlier exclusive focus on women as the vulnerable victims of armed conflict. This new focus on agency is stressed in Resolution 1325 through the emphasis on women's role as *peacemakers*. After expressing concern for women and children as adversely affected by armed conflict, the Resolution reaffirms 'the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peace-building...' (Kuehnast 2011: 131). Because of women's role as *peacemakers*, the Resolution emphasizes the importance of the representation of women at all decision-making levels and the participation of women in conflict resolution and peace processes (ibid.: 132). Although feminist critics certainly support women sitting at the peace table, as Cynthia Enloe has noted it is important to know *which* women are sitting at the peace table. Often they are the wives or daughters of the male leaders of the warring parties, whose presence is

enough to satisfy donors, but not enough to be taken seriously in the peacemaking process.<sup>6</sup>

However, identifying women's agency with the role of peacemakers is problematic, as it conceptually maintains the polarity of 'men-as-naturally aggressive, women-as-naturally peaceful' (Cohn 2004, 14).<sup>7</sup> As feminist theorists have exhaustively shown, not only does this binary erase differences between women and men, and separate gender from class, ethnicity, race, religion, and sexuality, it is also empirically false to suggest that women's role as mothers has endowed them with a special peacekeeping power. Maternal ideologies have often been highly militarized, as was the case historically under Nazism (Mosse 1985). And in feminist discussions of just war theory, maternal thinking has not proved to be identical to anti-militarism. Jean Bethke Elshtain, an early feminist working in the field of international relations, has drawn on maternal thinking in her criticism of the first Gulf War (cited in Sylvester 2013: 42). But her interest in assessing political actions and policies on the basis of 'what effect these policies have on our most vital and fragile human relationships... (from) the standpoint of the child and the child's needs' (Elshtain 1992: 55) did not prevent her from arguing for pro-militaristic politics post 9-11 (Elshtain 2003).

Thus, although Resolution 1325 purportedly supports women's agency, in reproducing the binary identities of masculine/feminine, aggressive/peaceful, and protector/protected embedded in patriarchal thinking about war, in defining women's agency in terms of their role as maternal peacemakers, and in treating them as an untapped resource for someone else's design (Cohn 2004: 17), the Resolution unreflectively reiterates the very injuries to women's freedom that it seeks to repair.

## GENDER AND VIOLENCE: THREE FRAMEWORKS OF INTERPRETATION

The treatment of the concept of women in Resolution 1325 sets the stage for the way it addresses gender and violence, including the notion of gender-based violence. As the resolution treats only women as vulnerable in war by virtue of their sex, phrases like ‘gender perspective’, ‘gender component’, and ‘gender considerations’ become synonymous with women. Since these phrases in the document are followed by references to ‘the special needs of women and girls,’ a gender perspective becomes equivalent to having a perspective on those who have a gender, that is, on women and girls.

This identification of gender with the concept of women is problematic in policy discourses that embrace the language of mainstreaming. The UN recognizes that the category of gender is broader than the category of women and defines gender mainstreaming as ‘a strategy for making women’s as well as men’s concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic, and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated’ (Hudson 2010: 261). Although many institutions have renamed projects by changing the word ‘women’ to ‘gender’, the substitution in language has had little impact on policy (Shepherd 2008: 120). This reduction of gender to women overlooks how a ‘gender perspective’ should include a study of the masculinities of war, a topic that has been central to feminist war studies.

Moreover, identifying gender with women implies that gender is an attribute of a subject (even though the resolution recognizes that these attributes are influenced by social and cultural factors), rather than recognizing the complex and multiple ways in which gender operates through power relations, symbolic meanings, discursive practices, and dynamic

processes that create the boundaries of subjectivity and lived embodiment. For example, it is only through recognizing that *values* are gendered that researchers can study how such values interact with poverty, war, and alcohol in understanding soldiers who rape. Maria Eriksson Baaz and Maria Stern argue that hegemonic models of masculinity are central to the sexual violence committed by soldiers in the Democratic Republic of Congo (Eriksson and Baaz 2010: 50). It is the ‘idea and ideal of militarized masculinity’ that a soldier expresses when he tells his interviewers, ‘If he has nothing in his pocket, he cannot eat or drink his coke, he has nothing to give to a woman – he will take her by force’ (Baaz and Stern 2010: 31-2), and when he distinguishes these ‘lust’ rapes from ‘evil’ rapes driven by a wish to humiliate and degrade victims. The dynamics of gender *positions* can also be actively used by individuals in navigating war zones. Mats Utas has coined the term *victimcy* to catch sight of the dynamics in which a woman presents herself as a victim of sexual violence as a strategy of social navigation in war zones to gain access to health care that is otherwise not accessible (Utas 2005).

Here I will identify three conceptual frameworks for analyzing the relationship between gender and violence. The first framework treats violence as acts that are *committed against individuals because of their sexuality and gender*, and is the framework that can be traced in Resolution 1325. This is also the approach subsumed under the concept of ‘sexual and gender-based violence’, widely referred to by the acronym SGBV, which includes ‘rape... sexual threats, exploitation, humiliation, assaults, molestation, domestic violence, incest, involuntary prostitution (sexual bartering), torture, insertion of objects into genital openings and attempted rape. Female genital mutilation and other harmful traditional practices (including early marriage which substantially increases

maternal morbidity and mortality) are forms of sexual and gender-based violence against women....’<sup>8</sup> The harms referred to under SGBV include a wide range of acts, and it is crucial for women’s health and safety that such acts be prevented and, when not prevented, punished. Resolution 1325 treats gender violence in war as ‘rape and other forms of sexual abuse’ and ‘sexual and other violence against women and girls’ (Kuehnast 2011: 133-4). Under the Women, Peace and Security agenda, these have become issues of international peace and security.

Although the international recognition of sexual violence committed against women and girls is long overdue, there are also limitations with this framework for understanding the relationship between violence and gender. Violence is treated as an aberration from normal relations, a sickness which is attributed to armed conflict as opposed to peacetime relations. It is assumed to be wielded by combatants and can only be remedied by peace operations (Väyrynen 2004: 130). In this approach, one precludes the possibility that violence can be wielded by states under normal conditions or by non-combatants before, during, or after periods of armed conflict, or that gender violence can be wielded against men and boys. Violence is treated as actions committed by armed male perpetrators against female victims in conflict, thereby delimiting violence in terms of its space (as belonging to inter-community relations (Väyrynen 2004: 132)), time (taking place during conflict rather than pre/post-conflict), subjects (with a focus on men as individual perpetrators), objects (with a focus on women and girl as victims of violence) and mode (with a focus on sexual violence and violence against women).

This way of understanding violence is close to an everyday understanding of violence in terms of aggressive individuals who intentionally inflict harm on weaker

individuals. It provides an easily operationalized approach, suitable for a quantitative focus on counting and recording of the number of incidents. And it makes a clear distinction between physical violence and other forms of violence, such as symbolic violence embodied in language or systemic violence within economic and political systems, which appears as part of the normal state of affairs and is thereby invisible<sup>9</sup> (Zizek 2008: 1-2). But instead of thinking of violence in terms of specific incidents, it is crucial to understand that violence is an event and that its occurrence and re-occurrence become part of the expectations of individuals who suffer it. Bruce Lawrence and Aisha Karim argue in writing about violence, ‘Whether individual or group-specific, whether erupting in the private or in the public domain, violence is always and everywhere process. As process, violence is cumulative and boundless. It always spills over. It creates and recreates new norms of collective self-understanding’ (Lawrence and Karim 2007: 11–12).

Taking a non-instrumental, process-oriented approach to violence leads one beyond the first framework to a second framework, which views violence as *productive* of gendered subjectivities and bodies. Shepherd argues, ‘Instances of violence are one of the sites in which gender identities are reproduced. Thus gendered violence is the violent reproduction of gender’ (Shepherd 2008: 51). In this framework, the violent reproduction of gender includes the wide variety of abuses linked to the notion of SGBV. But this second framework also focuses on the wide range of social, symbolic, and economic forms of violence that are also part of the violent reproduction of gender, including material dispossession, lack of access to health care, and lack of education. With SGBV, as with other forms of bureaucratized language, one needs to be wary of how acronym thinking may create a narrow or misguided focus in policy.<sup>10</sup>



However, catching sight of the violent reproduction of gender in this second framework of analysis raises what philosophers would call the transcendental question of the conditions for the possibility of this violence. Walter Benjamin pursued this thought when he carried out a historico-philosophical critique of violence and argued that violence has a law-making or law-preserving character (Benjamin 1986: 283-4). Law-making is power-making, and as such is a manifestation of violence (Benjamin 1986: 295), an insight that applies to norm-making as well. Here one can understand the need for a third framework for understanding the relationship between violence and gender – that *violence is immanent in norms of gender*, highlighting the constitutive role of violence in the second framework. The soldiers in the Democratic Republic of Congo who distinguish lust rapes from evil rapes do not question the ideal of masculinity as entitling them to access to women, whether by money or by force. And donor agendas that only provide health care to victims of sexual violence reinforce the gender stereotype of women as victims and deprive them of life-saving resources. The violence suffered in these examples lurks in the very norms and ideals that drive these everyday practices.

One might object that widening the concept of violence to violent processes that may be systemic, symbolic, or normative is too broad, and implies that any form of classification is a form of violence.<sup>11</sup> And indeed theories of performativity acknowledge that marking off has normative force and does some violence (Butler 1993: 11). But this insight does not preclude us from distinguishing between different forms or intensities of violence, or from acknowledging that some forms of violence fundamentally undermine the way human beings make sense of the world, understand themselves as embodied beings, and understand others (Staudigl 2011: 202).

## THE POLITICS OF AMBIGUITY

Feminist academics argue that Resolution 1325 displays an essentialist inheritance in characterizing women as maternal peace-makers, in linking women's political roles with their biological capacities, and in identifying gender with women. Feminist criticisms of essentialism can be traced back to Simone de Beauvoir's insights in *The Second Sex* that one is not born a woman but rather becomes a woman, and it is to the concept of situation that one must turn to make concrete definitions of human groups 'without enslaving them to a timeless and deterministic pattern' (Fricker 2003: 209-10). Although Gayatri Spivak has earlier argued that a feminist 'cannot afford *not* to be essentialist' – that is, cannot afford not to affirm the bodily, epistemological, political, and ontological basis of feminism (Braidotti 1994: 189, 177) – I propose instead that, in thinking about gender and security, one should take the risk of ambiguity.

Some feminists inspired by Critical Security Studies refer to 'zones of ambiguity', an acknowledgement that the binary opposition between non-combatants and combatants holds less in post-Westphalian wars than in traditional Clausewitzian wars (Vårynen 2007: 135). The notion of zones of ambiguity is a reminder that non-combatants also contribute to warfare (e.g., providing medical services, food, shelter, and also may be targeted in combat (e.g., through mass rapes or gender-selective mass murder). Shepherd refers to 'a feminist politics of uncertainty' (Shepherd 2008: 50) that interrogates the reproduction of differences, such as sexual, ethnic, or religious differences, rather than assuming given differences as a starting point for feminist political theory or practice.

In a philosophical key, ambiguity as used by Beauvoir is rooted in an understanding of human existence as finite, temporal, embodied and inter-subjective. The notion of ambiguity stresses that human beings are

not defined by a pre-existing concept or identity, but also acknowledges that it is the concrete situation that provides the material parameters for our bodies and lives. Ambiguity underscores the multiple significations and indeterminacy of meaning (Langer 2003: 90). With its focus on interpretation and situation (both the body as situation and the body in situation), the concept is used in certain philosophical, ethical, and literary approaches. But as the notion of ambiguity provides neither a method nor a concrete goal – indeed, it challenges the reliance on pre-fabricated methods of analysis and the assurance that goals can certainly be achieved – it seems counter-intuitive to appeal to ambiguity in discussions of gender and security. Nonetheless, taking the risk of ambiguity in addressing issues of gender and security opens important possibilities. This concept breaks apart the binaries that have haunted this discourse, allowing one to catch sight of how human beings are differently vulnerable as sexed beings during war, as well as in pre-war and post-war moments.

With regard to the Women, Peace and Security agenda, a politics of ambiguity would acknowledge that addressing peace and security for women also involves addressing peace and security for men and boys, who may be the brothers, husbands, sons, fathers, neighbours, teachers, tormenters, or friends of women. Men are also vulnerable as sexed beings in war, both in terms of how war reproduces certain patterns of masculinity, and how men suffer violence in warfare either through sexual selection (as in massacres against civilian men) or through sexual violence or discrimination based on sexual orientation. These processes of violence are interrelated, as the fear of being identified as homosexual is one of the factors in the under-reporting of sexual violence against men (Sivakumaran 2007: 271-2). Peace and security for men should also secure access to health care, as well as ensure that they

receive salaries for their services (e.g., the case of the soldiers in the Democratic Republic of Congo who had nothing in their pockets).

As the concept of ambiguity insists on a temporal focus, in the context of peace and security it draws attention to how violence has a transformative impact on human lives and social relations well beyond the specific war zones, wartime, or sector of society (Sylvester 2013: 25). Hans Joas has argued that the experience of violence leaves lasting marks not only on the victims but also the perpetrators. In a study of American Vietnam war veterans who had actively participated in maltreatment while in combat, the incidence of suicide, fatal car accidents, poisonings, drug overdoses and arrests for acts of violence distinguished combat veterans from other groups. Combat, he notes 'transforms the soldiers' personality so that their relation to violence is changed over the long term' (Joas 2003: 117-18). Societies that experience chronic conditions of war or inter-group conflict also experience an increase in family violence (Minow 2002: 64). Hence, one cannot separate the issue of women's security in war from women's security in domestic civilian life, both with respect to domestic rape (rape of civilians in 'peacetime') and domestic violence (family violence).

Moreover, as the concept of ambiguity focuses on situation, as opposed to pre-given categories of identity, it opens a wide lens of analysis for understanding the conditions of the situation in which gendered identities, meanings, and values are reproduced. Such a wide lens is necessary to understand how violence reproduces gender identities, for example, through bureaucratic procedures or legislation regarding reproductive rights. Finally, in drawing attention to the lived experience of this situation, a politics of ambiguity highlights the human price paid to laws and norms when trading protection for submission.

## ‘MAKING FRIENDS WITH THE BEAST?’ THE ROLE OF FEMINIST CRITICS

Here I have presented substantive criticisms of the concepts of women, gender, and violence embedded in Resolution 1325, while also applauding its significance in raising the issues of gender and violence to the level of international security. I have highlighted problematic binaries, the identification of gender with women, and the failure to understand the dynamic processes of gender and violence. In this context, I have identified three frameworks in the interpretation of gender and violence, arguing that it is insufficient to understand gendered violence solely in terms of acts committed against individuals because of their sexuality and gender. Instead, one needs to understand how violence reproduces gendered bodies and subjectivities, as well as how violence is immanent in the laws and norms sustaining such relationships. As an alternative to the form of essentialism embedded in Resolution 1325, I have turned to the philosophical notion of ambiguity, which opens up questions about the complex conditions for situations of violence, the multiple actors involved, their interrelations, and the on-going impact of these factors over time. But as one reviewer of this article asked, ‘Which actor should use this politics of ambiguity (national legislators, civil servants, UN diplomats, NGO activists)?’.

This question highlights the different interest groups in this discussion, as well as the precarious position of academic critics engaged in the work of knowledge production. Ambiguity is a concept of interpretation that is not translatable into specific methods, strategies or goals. And yet the concept also displays the ‘theory gap’ that exists between feminist academics working with issues of gender and violence, and legislators, civil servants, diplomats, and activists. What does this ‘theory gap’ mean for the question? Should feminist critics

make friends with the beast? The role of the theorist is to provide epistemological and political interventions when they are called for, rather than provide an affirmative account of social relations. Feminist researchers who debate with the Women, Peace and Security agenda are acting as ‘specific’ intellectuals (Foucault 1980: 126) in engaging in a contestation over concepts that have been mainstreamed by international institutions of governance. In doing so, they implicitly maintain both that ideas matter, and that institutions like the UN can instantiate progressive goals. In this sense, my answer to this question is a provisional ‘yes’. But as the role of the theorist – here in the guise of the feminist critic – is to interrogate what counts as knowledge and analyze its political implications, this answer can only ever be provisional.

## NOTES

1. Resolutions 1325, 1889, 1820, and 1888 are included as Appendices in Kuehnast 2011. My references to the texts of the resolutions will be by page number to this book.
2. [http://www.peacewomen.org/security\\_council\\_monitor/about-women-peace-and-security-agenda?adhocpage=4446](http://www.peacewomen.org/security_council_monitor/about-women-peace-and-security-agenda?adhocpage=4446) accessed March 6, 2013.
3. Even though Socrates argued in the *Apology* (303-31c) that he was a gift to the Athenians in acting as a gadfly in arousing, persuading and reproaching them, he was still condemned to death.
4. For a thorough discussion of the concepts and challenges of gender mainstreaming, I refer the reader to the FEMCIT Gender Mainstreaming Report, Hilda Rømer Christensen, “Mainstreaming Gender, Diversity, and Citizenship: Concepts and Methodologies” 2011, [http://www.femcit.org/files/WP7\\_WorkingpaperNo4Revised.pdf](http://www.femcit.org/files/WP7_WorkingpaperNo4Revised.pdf)
5. To the historical and political arguments against defining individuals in terms of pre-existing essences, one can add the existentialist objection. According to existentialists, a human being is not defined in advance as having an essence; rather, existence precedes essence. But a human being is

not free to be anything whatsoever, since she/he is situated.

6. Cynthia Enloe made these comments during a workshop meeting of the 'Gender, Power, Violence' group held at the University of Iceland on November 5, 2011.

7. Lene Hansen draws on the methods of discourse analysis to show how the meaning of such binaries is constructed 'through the discursive juxtaposition between a privileged sign on the one hand and a devalued one on the other' leading to 'a conceptualization of identity in relational terms...' (Hansen 2006: 19). Shepherd describes her own approach also as 'discourse-theoretical analysis' (Shepherd 2008: 19).

8. This is the definition provided in UNFPA *Reproductive Health in Refugee Situations: An Inter-Agency Field Manual*, Chapter 4, <http://www.unfpa.org/emergencies/manual/4.htm> accessed March 12 2013.

9. See my discussion of violence in Schott 2013.

10. Cynthia Enloe notes the danger in acronym thinking: 'Not feeling outrage, allowing oneself to slip into a bureaucratized distancing – for instance, reducing acts of gang rape to 'GPV' – will not enable one to stay focused...' (Enloe 2010: 307).

11. Julie Zahle raised this question after my talk at the Forum for Samfundsvidenskaberne's Filosofi, University of Copenhagen, on March 13, 2013. I would like to thank the audience for this and other useful questions.

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