From Depletion to Regeneration: Addressing Structural and Physical Violence in Post-Conflict Economies

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Drawing on depletion through social reproduction and political economy of violence against women (PEVAW) approaches, we show how the context of violence intensifies the depletion of women’s lives as they labor to meet their household needs; and how this depletion heightens their vulnerability to violence in conflict-affected contexts and inhibits their roles in peacebuilding. We propose the concept of the “regenerative state,” as a post-conflict moment of openness when state policy underpinned by attention to issues of depletion, social reproduction, and violence against women can help reshape gendered power relations in post-conflict transitions.

To be a mother
Is to look at poverty at its face.
For the cruelty of war
Lies not on heads that roll,
But tables always empty.
How does one look for food for the eldest
As a baby sucks at one’s breast?
Joi Barrios (1990)

Introduction

What does it mean to recast conflicts and post-conflict transitions through the lens of social reproduction? How might a focus on processes of human depletion that can accompany the doing of social reproduction advance a more nuanced and systematic analysis of the complex range of sites and forms of gendered violence across conflict transitions? As the epigraph conveys, the

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doi:10.1093/sp/jxz034
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standpoint of women, including mothers, provides a different voice on the experience and impact of conflict—one that is grounded in the labors of the everyday reproduction and maintenance of life. In situations of conflict and their aftermath, feminist research has shown that gender shapes the distinct experiences and insecurities of women and girls (Cahn, Haynes, and Ni Aolán 2011). These insecurities are defined by direct and physical forms of violence such as heightened risks for rape and sexual violence as well as other forms of gender-based violence during conflict (Swaine 2018). They also constitute long-term harms such as maternal mortality, impoverishment, and decline in well-being in the aftermath. Culcasi (2019) notes that:

[W]ar affects women from the bedroom to the battlefield . . . for most women war is experienced within intimate spaces. Intimate spaces are rarely the focus of mainstream academic research or media reporting; thus, women’s experiences of war and displacement are often concealed.

Jacqui True (2012) argues that physical gender-based violence is much more likely to occur in the context of structural violence reflected in prevailing patterns of gender discrimination, barriers to accessing post-conflict resources, and women’s exclusion from peace processes and political decision-making. Globally, there have been important strides in rendering visible the “conflict-related” violence that women and girls experience in security frameworks such as the United Nation (UN) Women, Peace and Security agenda (Davies and True 2019). As this article will show, social reproduction is a vital yet taken-for-granted resource for the survival of affected populations during and after conflicts especially in war-torn urban and rural communities and in sites such as internal displacement and refugee camps (see Tanyag 2018). We argue that the recognition and redistribution of care should be an integral part of conflict response and peacebuilding. At present, however, unpaid care labor is hardly recognized or supported by state and international actors in post-conflict reconstruction. This nonrecognition and undervaluing of gender-specific roles in household reproduction and care labor by society and by state and international financial institutions (IFIs) that direct economic policy and planning affects the policy and development strategies that could reverse this depletion of lives and the risks of the recurrence of conflict. Often the state provisioning of social infrastructure via transitional macroeconomic and social reform policies does not reflect the gender-specific impacts of these policies, in particular, on women’s labor and wellbeing in households in conflict-affected contexts. Thus, the gendered political economy approach advanced in this article aims to not only stem the unequal costs of rebuilding in the aftermath of conflicts but also by recognizing the important role of social reproduction also paves the way for the regeneration of societies and their peaceful transformation into more caring and gender-equal societies.
Social reproduction is the labor that goes into reproducing social life. This includes biological reproduction, unpaid production in the home (both goods and services), social provisioning (such as voluntary work directed at meeting community needs), the reproduction of culture and ideology, and the provision of sexual, emotional, and affective services in the household required to maintain family and intimate relationships (Hoskyns and Rai 2007; Rai, Hoskyns, and Thomas 2014). In conflict-affected situations, the deterioration in physical infrastructure and public services, and reduced social expenditures heighten the pressures on those who perform social reproductive roles. As it is predominantly women who care for injured and traumatized family members, and provision soldiers and displaced communities, they are most adversely affected without adequate social infrastructure to support them. Of course, women also perform paid productive activities under these conditions, which can also increase pressure on them. These pressures intensify what Rai, Hoskyns, and Thomas (2014) have called “depletion through social reproduction” (DSR).

The article is structured in the following way: the first part of the article draws together the two main bodies of work that explore, respectively, the processes of depletion and violence in post-conflict environments to demonstrate the potential to integrate the costs and contributions of women’s unpaid care labor across conflict analysis and post-conflict rehabilitation. The second part of the article highlights women’s unpaid labor in conflict-affected settings and shows how valuing household care economies could promote post-conflict recovery and reconstruction. The third part of the article introduces the concept of “regeneration” to the post-conflict reconstruction toolkit as a way of reshaping gendered social relations through the recognition and redistribution of social reproduction. It requires the framing of peace settlements that promote new policy and economic frameworks at community, national, and international levels. Crucially, we argue, these frameworks must recognize the value of social reproduction and establish the social infrastructures to support and sustain it as an integral part of post-conflict reconstruction while at the same time working toward engaging both women and men in its delivery.

Bridging the Political Economy of Violence against Women and DSR

Integrating the political economy of violence against women (PEVAW) and DSR frameworks in conflict and post-conflict situations enables us to connect multiple facets of structural violence and physical or direct violence to processes of depletion and harm; to make visible the multiple scales at which violence reverberates and is experienced; and to challenge the limited temporalities of violence in existing post-conflict frameworks. Scholarship on
PEVAW has revealed how structural inequalities rooted in patriarchal control over material resources and decision-making exacerbate women’s vulnerability to various forms of violence including during and after conflict. Scholarship on DSR has identified how the devaluation or nonrecognition of social reproduction, including unpaid care labor, leads to the depletion of the wellbeing of individual women, households, and communities. DSR, on its own, is unable to connect the devaluing of social reproduction with a broader analysis of violence and conflict-affected situations. Diana Sankey (2014) has alerted us to deprivations of subsistence needs as a discrete form of violence, or “subsistence harms” that can impact transitional justice after conflict or violence. Despite the growing evidence of these harms in post-conflict situations, there is a pervasive gendered expectation by individuals, governments, and international donors that the daily provisioning of care during and in the immediate aftermath of a crisis is an endlessly elastic and self-renewing resource (Elson 2000). Bringing together PEVAW and DSR, we note that these socioeconomic harms intensify DSR as women in conflict-affected situations struggle to meet the needs of their households and communities, leading to a ripple effect of harms. That ripple effect includes heightened vulnerability to, as well as the experience of, physical violence in conflict-affected public and private spaces such as homes, workplaces, villages/cities, roads, displacement or refugee camps, military compounds, and so on.

Therefore, our argument in this article is that taken together, these two approaches shed light on women’s experiences of insecurity and help to explain why women’s voices have been absent from post-conflict agenda setting despite Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16.7, which calls for “responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels” and the negative effects of this absence. Whilst feminist scholars have sought to connect the gendered political economy processes that undergird conflicts and peace settlements and to integrate feminist political economy and security analysis (Bergeron, Cohn, and Duncanson 2017; Elias 2015), we argue that there are major gaps in our knowledge in addressing this problem due in part to the “siloing” of security, humanitarian, and development policy responses. We now turn to outline our two frameworks.

**Conceptualizing Harms as Depletion**

As advanced by Rai, Hoskyns, and Thomas (2014), DSR occurs, albeit at different rates and levels in different social contexts, when the gap between the outflows—domestic, affective, and reproductive labor—and the inflows—medical care, income earned, and leisure time—falls below a threshold of biological, financial, and affective sustainability. DSR denotes the specific economic analysis of the distribution and cost of performing paid and unpaid social reproductive in the household and social institutions such as schools, hospitals, community organizations, religious organizations, and so on. As
feminist scholars have pointed out, while social reproduction sustains human relations as much as, and if not more than the productive economy and begins in the household or family unit. However, this economy is relatively “invisible” with the work involved in caring mostly uncounted and unmeasured in national and international systems despite its importance in daily survival. Unpaid care economies, in particular, are expected to cushion “crisis shocks” whether associated with financial crashes or conflict outbreak or humanitarian disasters (Folbre 2014). They frequently serve as safety nets in the face of minimal or decreasing economic inflows during conflict and post-conflict conditions of austerity (Elson 2012) and often state collapse. DSR can help to identify how the mal-recognition and mal-distribution of social reproduction can lead to increased level of human depletion under conditions of conflict and during post-conflict situations. For example, when applied to conflict-affected settings, the framework highlights the greater demands on women’s labor in procuring basic needs including food, water, clothing, shelter, health, and education for their families as a result of war-damaged physical and social infrastructure. Blocked and broken transport, deterioration of services needed to care for of sick, injured, and traumatized children and family members can generate an increased need to secure more income to cover household necessities, for example, because of inflation in prices or loss of employment, which can also add to the burden of work. DSR stresses the costs of women’s increasing labor on their health and wellbeing, and on their capacity to continue to participate beyond the household in social and political life at a time when new post-conflict political arrangements are taking shape, often shutting them out of conversations about the reshaping of post-conflict societies.

While the DSR approach does not explicitly use the language of conflict or violence, it does reflect four types of harms that result from the non- or mal-recognition of social reproduction: discursive harm, emotional harm, bodily harm, and harm to citizenship entitlements (Rai, Hoskyns, and Thomas 2014, 91). These harms constitute indirect forms of violence, which relate to “structures of inequality that are inextricably intertwined with gender and implicated in how society arranges care” (Razavi 2007, 2). Violence can disrupt everyday life and can adversely affect the coping strategies available to individuals, households, and communities. Take, for example, women’s everyday lives in Palestine, where in addition to worrying about their children being harmed by the Israeli military they also have to cope with negotiating checkpoints to access food, visit friends and relatives, and go to work, adding another layer of anxiety to their already stressful lives. Moreover, as Ni Aolain has argued, in times of conflict, “individual violations create communities of harm, which include not only the victim herself but also those people who are closely tied to her emotionally, or who are in a relationship of co-dependency with her” (Ní Aolá 2009, 219). Resilience, often discursively mobilized by the state and international agencies as an important agential route to recovery
from violence, cannot, we argue, be taken as a given. Individual coping strategies during and after conflict are inseparable from relationships of mutual interdependence as well as of unequal gendered social relations. DSR can thus help to reveal, analyze, and map these communities of harm and to develop strategies to support those who are experiencing depletion at individual, community, and societal levels. We now turn to outline the key features of the PEVAW framework and show how this combines with DSR to provide a holistic approach to gendered violence against women in particular, in conditions of conflict and post-conflict.

Harms and the PEVAW

The PEVAW approach considers both material inequalities and underlying vested interests in cultural norms and practices as gendered structural conditions for vulnerability to violence against women and girls. Feminist political economy analysis of violence against women in conflict and nonconflict-affected situations has been principally concerned with tracing how “gendered inequalities that fuel violence against women are rooted in structures and processes of political economy that are increasingly globalized” (True 2012, 5). Addressing social and economic livelihoods thus is integral to ending all forms of such violence in the aftermath of conflicts. As True argues, “failure to address equality in access to social and economic resources in post-conflict societies accentuates women’s economic poverty and material insecurity relative to men and, consequently, their vulnerability to violence”, especially in displacement and in woman-headed households (True 2012, 139). Failure to address impunity for conflict-related violence against women, as Swaine (2018) argues, compounds this vulnerability.

In conflict and post-conflict countries where there are usually few income-generating alternatives, new forms of gendered exploitation such as forced and child marriage, kidnapping, trafficking, and coercive sex work tend to emerge in the absence of mitigating structures and policies. For example, in Syria’s war economy, women have been used as a form of currency to further political, military, and economic goals by being sold into marriage, kidnapped for ransom, traded for weapons and safe travel, and for basic necessities such as rent (Alsaba and Kapilashrami 2016; Carrie, Zayat and Masi 2017). In Iraq, Lebanon, and Jordan, child marriage has increased alarmingly among Syrian refugees, encouraged by parents to protect their daughters from the threat of sexual violence as well as to alleviate economic pressures (Save the Children 2014). Moreover, there are contexts where conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence is clearly part of a political economy of resources extraction or competition over resources, such as in the conflicts in the Democratic Republic of Congo (Meger 2016). These forms of physical violence in conflict exist on a continuum with the structural violence manifested in the economic grievances of men who are harmed by the loss of their former breadwinner
status or protector identities vis-à-vis women. Domination and subordination of women become strategies for regaining masculinity when male identity is weakened by the nature of conflict-affected political economies (Durie-Smith 2016). These linkages between everyday violence and the distinct harms that arise in conflict-affected settings need to be examined in greater depth. As Elias and Rai (2015, 428) point out, with a few exceptions there is “a gap within feminist studies of the household and social reproduction in political economy when it comes to the issue of violence.” We argue that certain experiences of gendered violence result from the accumulated harms that stem from nonrecognition and marginalization of women’s wellbeing. For example, Jennings and Nikolić-Ristanović (2009) found that women continue to be both imported and exported for sex work a decade after end of the Bosnian War, with the number of foreign women decreasing and the number of Bosnian victims increasing significantly because of the economic desperation and lack of alternative economic opportunities that many women face in the post-conflict society.

Bringing both DSR and PEVAW into focus is important because “those who are invisible as producers [as workers] will be invisible in distribution” (Rai, Hoskyns, and Thomas 2014, 93) both in terms of the allocation of resources but also the redistributive policies and services provided by the state and other actors to counter violence against women. Economic marginalization of women and girls thus constitutes a form of structural violence that may further intensify the political economy of violence and bodily harm that women and girls distinctly experience during and after conflict. Indeed, this in turn might lead to increasing the chances for the resumption of violence and conflict as the depletion of carers adds pressure to the local economies (see Chilmeran and Pratt 2019; World Bank/United Nations 2018).

Multi-Scalar Violence

Feminist scholars studying violence and those studying social reproduction have emphasized that individual experiences of harms are significantly affected by competitive global economic processes that tend to exploit women’s labor and push them into precarious situations in which they have little power to protect themselves. As we have noted above, both the DSR and the PEVAW approaches analyze harm across multiple sites and at multiple scales. Rai, Hoskyns, and Thomas (2014) connect micro household labor processes and macro policies and outcomes by identifying three mains sites of depletion, namely individuals, households, and communities. They stress the interaction across these three sites such that depletion at the household and community level can be examined with reference to the overall decline in individual well-being and vice versa. For example, women’s bodies can be seen as visible markers of depletion fueled by a crisis in social reproduction. However, “social relations are historically specific, culturally contested and affect the
ways in which bodies are viewed, depleted and renewed” (Rai, Hoskyns, and Thomas 2014, 90). True’s (2012, 20) PEVAW model also identifies three layers of structural violence: the household economy, global economy, and militarism and war economies. By connecting these different elements, the PEVAW approach argues for both a structural and context-specific analysis of the causes and consequences of violence against women. Physical violence experienced by women needs to be understood as tethered to the structural violence of systems of oppression; PEVAW critically does this and alerts us to the harm that is attendant upon these layers of violence.

War and militarism may be reinforced by global political economy structures that perpetuate modes of exclusion and extraction sustained by the accumulation and distribution of natural resources. They are also legitimized by ideologies of masculinity and femininity which take root in household social relations. We see this, for instance, in current “strongman” political leaders who project hyper-masculinity in conflict situations embodying the “role of the provider in the patriarchal family-household” and “legitimate protector writ large to citizens ... often in the name of women and children” (True 2015b, 420). Discursive representations of gender at the global level shape and often legitimize everyday experiences of physical and structural violence at household and community levels to the extent that they legitimize particular approaches to security. For example, maternal mortality is largely preventable but deaths still occur on a large scale especially in fragile and conflict-affected settings not only because of conflict but also because of the structural violence manifested by poor health infrastructure and services. The gradual depletion of women’s lives culminates in the gender-specific violence of maternal death, which could have been addressed by economically valuing women’s social reproductive labor and health, and as a matter of security in times of conflict (Tanyag 2018). Neglecting the care economy after conflict through the gradual or immediate erosion of care institutions and services constitutes structural violence. The consequences of this neglect are ultimately preventable deaths (Li and Wen 2005), as well as physical and mental depletion legitimized by gendered symbols and discourses, and pervasive gender-based violence. A multi-scalar approach is thus needed to examine this intimate relationship between social reproduction and gender-based violence in post-conflict economies.

Conflict-Related Violence versus Everyday Violence

We have argued above that the DSR framework does not consider violence as evidence of depletion and PEVAW does not have a specific approach for identifying and analyzing the intensifying costs of social reproductive work under conditions of conflict and post-conflict. The PEVAW and DSR approaches, taken together, however, challenge conventional understandings of violence in conflict situations. Feminist scholars have proposed that
conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence are on a continuum with everyday forms of gender-based and structural violence outside of conflict (see Swaine 2018). Elias and Rai define violence as “regimes of labor, law and policy that secure the boundaries of the public and the private, of property, systems of rule-making and of justificatory ideologies of separation and segregation, where boundaries of race, ethnicity, and sexuality are created and defended by violent acts” (Elias and Rai 2019, 214). This continuum is obscured in mainstream definitions of conflict which are based on counts of “battle-deaths” or direct fatalities rather than gradual, socioeconomic harms that are more difficult to measure yet fundamental to the social fabric of communities (True 2015a). Another example is how wars and conflicts contribute to intergenerational trauma. There is less attention given to addressing emotional and psychological harms suffered by victims of conflict than to immediate and egregious acts of violence. Because of this, primary caregivers, who are predominantly women and girls, might suffer enduring harms after conflicts, which are typically left unaddressed in post-conflict reconstruction.

Feminist political economists have examined social reproduction and the costs of neglecting the care economy in the context of economic crises (Elson 2012; Rai, Hoskyns, and Thomas 2014; Hozic and True 2016), health epidemics (Harman 2016), displacement (Tanyag 2018), and in the context of feminized forms of productive labor and migration (Gunawardana 2016; Piper 2003). Unlike, PEVAW analysis, however, the DSR framework has not been applied to the analysis of depletion in conflict-affected situations. In the next section, integrating the insights of both approaches we ask what are the “care regimes” (Razavi 2007) of post-conflict states and societies and why does women’s unpaid labor particularly matter in conflict-affected settings? In so doing, we also bring together feminist security studies and feminist international political economy literatures by re-engaging with the concept of the continuum of violence. We now explore what depletion looks like within the context of post-conflict transitions where both structural- and gender-based violence are often endemic.

**Household Care Economies and Post-Conflict Recovery**

The household is a key unit in mobilizing material and ideological resources especially human resources in conflict and post-conflict. Social reproduction underpins peace initiatives and also sustains violence in times of conflict. We have argued that care provisioning is ever present in times of conflict and its aftermath. It is the one constant on all fronts of violence. As we have noted above, social reproductive labor ranges from providing food for families, provisioning soldiers with food and shelter, providing care including health care for injured or displaced persons, and contributing to community services, which may have been destroyed, discontinued, or dislocated. Gendered
expectations of altruism and self-sacrifice are also prominent in times of crisis (Tanyag 2018, 10). However, care is needed by victims of violence as well as by armed combatants; it is required to sustain households in displacements as much as in insurgent households. It is, therefore, important both as a resource as well as meriting recognition in its own terms, and therefore needing support.

In households, women’s caring labor refashions cultural, national and other group identities and ideologies, which has material implications for the reallocation of power and resources in post-conflict transitions. Post-war settlements, however, are often captured by conservative, “far right” or religious fundamentalist ideologies that seek to curtail women’s autonomy, fuel communal violence, and regress advances in human rights in the name of tradition and “the family.” Indeed, pro-natalism in the aftermath of conflicts has been a historical pattern (Yuval-Davis 1997). Women face pressures to reproduce a group’s collective identity biologically and culturally as a way of replenishing “stock.” Moreover, the salience of the family institution in post-conflict reconstruction may negatively affect sexual and reproductive rights and privilege heteronormativity as a way to allocate value and reward contributions (see Griffin 2007). This has implications for the marginalization and invisibility of sexual minorities in post-conflict processes. It also points to how social reproductive work needs to be analyzed through the dual lenses of PEVAW and DSR.

In conflict-affected households, women are especially impacted by continuing violence and severe violation of economic and social rights as a result of reductions in social infrastructure and public expenditure (True et al. 2017). Diane Elson argues, with respect to nonconflict-affected societies, that governments frequently fail to factor in the costs of women’s unpaid labor when making policies that reduce public services or social protection measures. Women’s labor is seen as “elastic,” expanding in unlimited ways to provision the significant basic needs of families and communities when the state, employers, or the community do not provide for them (Elson 1995, 25; Rai, Hoskyns, and Thomas 2014). This is also the prevailing assumption of policymakers in incipient state structures, donor agencies, and international financial and development institutions in conflict and recovery from conflict. Culcasi notes that “paid work is understudied within feminist geopolitics, but such a focus renders important insights into how gender shapes experiences of displacement and how displacement is reshaping gendered relations” (Culcasi 2019, 1). Economic analysis has shown that “improved access to public infrastructure affects women’s time allocation decisions and, in turn, changes in these decisions affect the process of growth and economic development” in low- and medium-income countries (Agénor and Agénor 2014: 25). As the paid and unpaid labor of women increases to support households, and social infrastructure deteriorates because of austerity policies and/or lack of investment, the pressures on women’s health and well-being intensify. This
is particularly the case in conflict-affected situations such as in contemporary Ukraine, for example. Below we bring together the DSR/PEVAW frameworks to demonstrate the value of this approach to addressing issues of social reproduction in conditions of conflict.

**Conflict-Affected Households in Ukraine—DSR/PEVAW Analysis**

The Ukraine government’s military operations in the Donbas region vis-à-vis Russian separatists began in April 2014 after the Russian annexation of Crimea, and led to a 25 percent contraction in equivalent economic output in one year. Defense spending substantially increased at the same time, reducing the funds to support economic and social infrastructure and reforms. In their Universal Periodic Review submission to the UN Human Rights Council based on consultations with Ukrainian women’s organizations, WILPF (2017) documented the negative gender impacts of the nationalism and militarism fueling the conflict and the International Monetary Fund (IMF)-mandated economic reforms in response. This report noted that the elimination of subsidies for fuel and heating led to much higher prices for gas, heating, electricity, transportation, and other goods and services related to fuel use and that this has had an extremely negative impact on the living standards of much of the population. A large percentage of people’s salaries can be spent on heating alone; even up to half of the salary or a quarter if there are two people with salaries in the same household. It dramatically affected women in rural areas, increasing their household labor and negatively affecting their health.

Extensive reduction in government spending in civil service workforce, health, education, and social services also had extremely negative consequences for the beneficiaries of social services including child care, disproportionately affecting women in two main ways. First, cutbacks in public health and social service expenditures effectively shifted care previously provided by the government to women. Health spending per capita dropped substantially from US $282 to US $125 in 2015 after the start of the war (World Bank Open Data. nd.). The Ukraine government effectively saved money by having women provide for free the services that it was no longer providing, enabling reallocation to defense. Second, education, health care, social work, and public administration were the sectors with most job cuts and salary freezes or reductions in the economic reform program. These were also the economic sectors with the highest representation of women, close to 80 percent of the total employees. During 2014–2015, 165,000 civil service jobs were cut within an overall plan to reduce 20 percent of the civil service. As a result, many women lost not only a stable income but also guarantees of social protection, such as maternity leave. No effective social protection programs or active labor market policies were introduced to re-employ or retrain of those who had been laid off. Women’s labor force participation declined as a result from 51 percent of the labor force in 2000 to 47 percent in 2017 (World Bank Open Data.
Very few countries have seen such a decline in women’s paid labor in the same time period. The negative impact of conflict and reform on women’s public sector employment has led to their employment in precarious forms of work where they are at heightened risk of depletion, abuse, and violence.

In the areas within or proximate to conflict in Ukraine, women’s labor is reported to be increasingly stretched given the pressure on the domestic sector to make up for deficiencies in public provision. This may result in a depletion of human capabilities because the household needs adequate inputs from all other sectors (Elson 2000, 28). In a recent ethnography time-use survey conducted with the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, women’s time spent on care activities in households within conflict areas was found to be far greater than in relatively stable areas and additionally affected by lack of social infrastructure under conflict conditions. From that pilot study, it was evident that in conjunction with the impact of inflation in prices and reduced employment due to austerity, adult women in conflict-affected households were seeking to increase their paid work participation even as the demands on their time spent in household social reproduction were greater than before the conflict. Informal economies of care were also evident, including grandparent care, babysitting paid in cash, and children providing care for other children enabling women to work for income to procure basic needs in an inflationary, conflict situation. In households where those informal economies did not function, women were often overburdened or unable to access employment. Women’s intensified labor was also possibly at the expense of their own health and that of their children. Poor health and access to health for women and their children have been documented in recent epidemiological research in Ukraine including in internally displaced communities (Cockerham et al. 2017; Nidzvetska et al. 2017).

Without adjustments to public provisioning and social protection in such a conflict- and austerity-affected situation, women’s health and wellbeing can be expected to decline with further negative effects on household and community wellbeing. This decline may also have an impact on conflict resolution given that women’s labor is integral to the recovery from conflict, especially in displaced communities, and that women’s organizing is known to be one of the societal contributors to sustainable peace (Krause, Krause, and Branfors 2018). If women’s lives are depleted, the capabilities of women to contribute to recovery and to peace processes beyond the household, at the community and national level will be severely constrained.

Depletion, because of the double burden of unpaid domestic work and increasing mobilization of women into the labor market, reduces their ability to participate in civil society activities, governance structures, or in any attempts at reviving peace processes. This can result in a depletion of communities that has implications for peacebuilding work. There are also significant obstacles to collective organizing when the efforts of individuals—especially women—are focused on merely being able to survive and maintain their households
Moreover, even though women might already be contributing significantly in the rebuilding of their communities, because of the invisibility of their labor, they are excluded from accessing resources and decision-making fora. As Rai, Hoskyns, and Thomas (2014) have argued, the lack of recognition of social reproductive work results in harm to women’s citizenship entitlements; they are treated more as recipients of welfare and a burden on the state or as service providers. This means that any investment in social infrastructure that might replenish women’s lives takes second place; the focus of post-conflict reconstruction remains on roads and railways rather than crèches and health clinics.

At a transnational level, in what Safri and Gibson (2010) have called “global households,” remittances rather than state social expenditures, official development assistance, or foreign direct investment constitute the largest type of financial flow to fragile conflict-affected contexts (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) 2016, 17). As Kunz (2011) has pointed out, increasingly transnational development organizations view these remittances as an instrument to finance development and reduce poverty and make sense of this phenomenon through a gender-blind lens that delinks the global political economy from the individual subject who generates these resources. Such an instrumental approach to remittances fails to connect the costs of generating remittances to the global neoliberal regimes of labor: using DSR as a lens, however, reveals these connections. In post-conflict societies, the remittance economy is typically large, but underestimated given personal cash transactions across borders (Bojicic-Dzelilovic 2013). In Ukraine, remittances have grown rapidly alongside the decline in the economy and the net migration out for work, from approximately USD 57 million in 1999 to almost USD 11 billion in 2018, now the equivalent of 10 percent of the gross domestic product. Between 2015 and 2017, it is estimated that four million people left Ukraine for work in Russia and other parts of Europe (Talant 2018). Remittances are a gendered phenomenon affecting individual, household, and society-wide depletion. For instance, more Ukrainian women than men have migrated for work and women are more likely to be long-term migrants than men. Divorced or widowed women constitute a substantial proportion of female migrant workers, raising concerns over children “left behind” (ILO 2017, 37). Moreover, women short-term migrant workers remit more than men (2,000 cf. 1,806 euros) even though they tend to earn less money while abroad. As a result, many households in Ukraine are dependent on remittances and women’s labor is directly implicated, constituting the majority of those generating remittances and having to increase their unpaid work in the household to compensate for a partner who has migrated for work.

The evidence on the positive impacts of remittances is thus mixed and there is no definitive research on their transformative potential beyond the immediate environment of migrants. Rather, research has shown that migrant
remittances are stop-gap resources that are exhausted in the daily provisioning of the conflict-affected family’s needs such as in education, food, and health even as some of these remittances are able to be allocated for savings and investments. The significant tradeoff involved in remittances-driven survival in fragile and conflict-affected areas is that dependence on these financial flows can negatively impact donor or post-conflict state investment in social infrastructure.

As the next section discusses, valuing these household care economies has the potential to regenerate post-conflict societies.

**Toward a Regenerative State**

As we have argued in the first two parts of this article, in conflict-affected contexts, DSR is heightened because there is typically little state support for women’s care responsibilities, leading to a double day carrying out income-earning activities and unpaid social reproductive activities while the demands in war and peacebuilding economies increase for both types of labor. In this section, we consider how social reproduction might be supported in post-conflict economies, depletion reversed and new approaches to a gender-responsive political economy of regeneration developed.

In the DSR framework, Rai, Hoskyns, and Thomas (2014) suggest three types of reversal of depletion are possible: mitigation, replenishment, and transformation. Mitigation is based on individual strategies, replenishment on state and nonstate provisioning, and transformation involves societal (re)valuing of women’s social reproductive labor. Mitigation and replenishment are short to medium-term responses to depletion. Mitigation reallocates care responsibilities without necessarily addressing their sustainability. Replenishment moves closer to sustainability but may not lead to transformation in gender relations due to embedded norms. For example, women’s health may be given support but only in so far as to encourage their role as primary caregivers, while maintaining male breadwinner identities and neglecting to address men’s power over women as expressed through gendered violence. Transformation requires societal recognition of social reproduction, redistribution of care labor and equal representation of women and men in political and economic decisions from the household to the wider societal level (cf. Fraser 2005).

Here we argue that post-conflict transitions provide us with a moment of openness that can be harnessed to establish both new institutional rules and norms and nonstate initiatives to redress inequalities, reduce depletion of carers, and thus contribute to sustainable and inclusive peace. This approach is neither to be confused with “liberal peacebuilding,” which pushes for neoliberal-type reforms in political, legal and economic systems, nor with a hybridity approach that focuses on interactions “between different institutional and social forms, and normative systems, in a wide range of contexts”
(Forsyth et al. 2017, 408). Rather, based on our analysis of DSR and PEVAW above, we put forward the idea of a regenerative state, which we situated within complex and interconnected systems of governance including state and nonstate actors, civil society groups and social movements that hold the state accountable to reverse depletion and reduce the chances for the recurrence of conflict by paying attention to social reproduction. We note three core elements of such a state, which are heuristic devises to explore what we need the post-conflict state to address as it takes shape under conditions of optimism, instability, and moments of possibility. The first element of the regenerative state aims to recognize the value of social reproductive work and supports the rebuilding of social infrastructure rather than just infrastructure related to the physical, built, and resources environment; the second intends to facilitate and be open to a politics of dialogic, deliberative, and participative conversation across conflict lines, involving inclusive processes and all stakeholders; and the third element aims to incorporate accountability mechanisms through a democratic framework for post-conflict rebuilding focused on a bottom-up approach to regeneration involving as above, civil society groups, social movement actors, and epistemic communities.

We could be accused of utopian thinking in suggesting such an approach to the state; we are well aware of the pitfalls of state power that can often reinforce gender hierarchies. Feminist theorists have long argued that gendered social relations are constitutive of western liberal and welfare states as well as postcolonial states, all of which have shored up the continued dominance of patriarchal relations of social production and reproduction (Fraser 2005; Parashar, Tickner, and True 2018; Randall and Waylen 2012; Yuval-Davis and Anthias 1989). However, as Cooper has argued, “whether virtual or material, reimagining involves deliberate practices of framing, interpreting, cutting and connection-drawing, as alternative histories and futures get posited” (Cooper, Dhawan, and Newman 2019, 2) While cautious of the politics of cooption, feminist scholars have also argued that state policy is a legitimate arena of contestation for women’s rights and gender justice (Hozic and True 2016; Htun and Weldon 2018; Meyer and Prugl 1999; Rai and Waylen 2008).

A regenerative state would promote gender equality in post-conflict reconstruction by recognizing women’s social reproductive work, facilitating women’s political agency through equal access to decision-making power, as well as recognizing and redressing conflict-related harms such as gender-based violence. This approach would support not only women engaged in social reproductive work, but all those who care and are cared for, by providing social infrastructure to support a good-quality care regime. Moreover, we conceive of the regenerative state as involving many actors and institutions including civil society and international actors in dialog with and involved in the redesign of gender-responsive institutions in post-conflict transitions.
Social Infrastructure

Peace is an expensive process, and many post-conflict resources are directed toward the rebuilding of physical infrastructure that may have few benefits for many women or that prioritize men’s needs and employment such as rebuilding roads (to the capital rather than to the local market for example) (Duncanson 2016). These gendered priorities for reconstruction may freeze a situation of inequality rather than advance gender equality. Regeneration in post-conflict transitions needs to direct resources to building social infrastructure that will support social reproductive work of care, affordable health for conflict-affected populations including sexual and reproductive health services, gender-responsive, quality public services such as sanitation, education from early-childhood to tertiary, and public safety, sustainable infrastructure, including access to clean energy, safe drinking water, safe design of transport systems, and urban spaces and social protection systems such as old-age pensions, child and family benefits, maternity/parental protection, and unemployment support. For example, a recent decision by a court in South Africa (Nkala and Others v. Harmony Gold Mining Company Limited and Others 2016) took the unusual step of acknowledging care work and ordering compensation not only to the affected miners but also their carers for the harm that they suffered: “Often, the care work requires fulltime attention, effectively compelling many women and girls to forego income-generating, educational, and other opportunities.” The court noted that general damages would benefit these carers by reducing their care work and would “indirectly compensate them for the care-work they have already provided” (Goldblatt and Rai 2018, 676). Such legal recognition can reduce and redistribute social reproductive labor, reversing depletion for carers. This has also been noted by the UN Commission on the Status of Women, especially with regard to conflict-affected women and communities (UN Economic and Social Council 2019). Such measures to reverse depletion can also greatly reduce the threat of violence, the potential for the recurrence of violence, and the role that they play in further depleting individuals, households, and societies.

Furthermore, gender-sensitive reparations programs that redress the harms suffered by civilian victims of conflict and the effects of conflict on the social and economic situation in the country could form part of building this social infrastructure (True 2012, 157–8). A fair share of post-conflict resources could be devoted to rebuilding the social infrastructure in societies. Toward this end, for example, the UN Peacebuilding Fund has adopted a 15 percent target for gender-responsive financing for peacebuilding initiatives while the UN Secretary General has recommended that states guarantee 15 percent of their post-conflict funds are dedicated to infrastructure and economic development that addresses women’s specific needs or empowerment and advancing gender equality (S/2010/466). With a feminist lens, we could further build the evidence to support this approach to a regenerative post-conflict state by
adapting Diane Elson’s (1995, 164–90) method of comparing the impact of reducing budget deficits with the impact of strengthening investments in human capacities and needs on economic growth, poverty reductions, and gender equality. Integrating gender impact analysis and gender budgeting into financing and needs assessments in post-conflict societies, and conducting regular audits to ensure that resources on the ground benefit social reproductive as well as productive capacities, and women and men equally, will be important.

**Participatory Policymaking**

The second element of a regenerative state is the potential to build and support capacity within civil (and wider) society to meaningfully participate and engage in economic reform processes, and to provide access for mobilization and dialog. Meaningful participation occurs when social reproductive labor is redistributed to enable equal participation in policymaking rather than requiring women to do multiple unremunerated shifts laboring in their households, in rebuilding their communities, and in post-conflict institutions. Toward this, there needs to be a greater representation of women in political institutions and public political spaces which is essential to the development of progressive social policies able to generate such redistribution (Dahlerup 2005; Htun and Weldon 2018; Rai 2007; Weldon and Htun 2013). Policies that promote regeneration from a gender perspective need to include gender equality in family laws and laws addressing the elimination of violence against women and girls. Women’s organizations are also often at the frontlines of post-conflict (Cahn, Haynes, and Ní Aoláin 2011) working with communities, providing support and counseling to victims of violence and displaced persons, organizing community dialogs, and other peacebuilding initiatives. They may be exposed to threats of political violence, constituting significant gendered costs to political participation for individual women and collectively. Policies that provide protection measures for politically active women, therefore, must be in place.

As an example, in Nepal, following the Comprehensive Peace Accord in 2006, Local Peace Committees were organized at district, municipal, and village level. By mandate, at least one-third of their members were women. They were intended to facilitate peacebuilding through the implementation of the peace agreement but the committees were not properly implemented, in part due to a lack of resources and external support (UN Women 2018, 27–8). One example of where broad-based participation and dialog has been effective in post-conflict recovery and could be extended to post-conflict economic reconstruction is via the Peace Huts model developed by Liberian women peace activists after the war in that country (UN Women 2018). These Peace Huts involved women mediating local disputes, monitoring police and justice services, referring victims of violence to services, and raising awareness within
communities regarding peacebuilding priorities, such as elections, decentralization, and natural resource concessions. The Huts proved to be a cost-effective way of reducing and even preventing violence in the community because they defused tensions and alerted police to potential violent outbreaks. But they also provided a space for women’s voices to be heard on priorities for peacebuilding, security, rule of law, and other issues, which could include the economy. At present, they have promoted women’s economic empowerment by organizing savings and loans groups and supporting the political aspirations of community women but the existing model could be extended to economic governance. However, foreign aid budgets allocated to supporting gender equality and women’s empowerment remain minimal with few states committed to the target of directing 15 percent of peacebuilding funding to promote gender equality and women’s empowerment in fragile and conflict-affected states.

Participation is also crucial to a regenerative state in a conflict transition, where land and property rights, access to justice, and redistribution programs are all vital to redress to reverse the depletion of social reproduction and eliminate gender-based violence and insecurity. For example, the 2016 Colombian Final Peace Agreement prioritized land rights and ownership, which included the establishment of the Land Fund to facilitate land redistribution (True and Riveros-Morales 2019). Rural women, female-headed households, and displaced persons are given priority under the framework; and their participation in the governance of land redistribution program is guaranteed. The implementation of these land reform provisions is at an early stage. However, the intention is to reduce women’s vulnerability to conflict-related violence by bolstering their economic rights and access.

There is also a window of opportunity in the mandate of IFIs, exemplified by the World Bank’s Systematic Country Diagnostics and development of the Country Strategic Framework and the IMF’s “Article V” consultations to promote broader participation in the early preparatory and analytical stages as well as during the implementation of post-conflict economic reforms and international support for that participation (True and Svedberg 2019). These civil society consultations, specifically including women and women’s civil society, could be a requirement prior to international approval of lending agreements, for instance.

Ensuring meaningful representation of women and men in any post-conflict decision-making process, whether for large-scale infrastructure or for as social infrastructure projects, would also engage citizens in participating as well as in holding the state accountable.

**Accountability Mechanisms**

The third element of a regenerative state that is important to reverse the DSR and the gendered violence that results are the accountability mechanisms
to ensure that state agencies and policies deliver on social infrastructure and participatory policymaking. Strong, democratic institutions with parity representation of women and men would be an important starting point for ensuring that social infrastructure development takes place. Furthermore, gender-sensitive, human rights impact assessment of economic reforms before any strategy or reform program is approved are one such accountability mechanism. There needs to be a clear, systematic and independent impact assessment carried out at all stages of post-conflict development interventions and investments to uphold economic, social, and cultural rights as well as civil and political rights and to ensure that, at the minimum, their implementation does no harm (True et al. 2017, 43). Mandatory gender and human rights-based indicators should be required as part of the monitoring and evaluation of all post-conflict programs. A more far-reaching accountability mechanism would involve establishing an independent, effective, and accessible complaints mechanism for violations of economic, social, and cultural rights and sex- and gender-based discrimination in the post-conflict country embedded in the framework for economic recovery and reconstruction. At the international level, an internal human rights compliance and gender monitoring and accountability process would also need to be established within IFIs that would serve as accountability mechanisms in relation to poverty reduction, human rights, and equalities responsibilities.

Democratic and accountable mechanisms outlined above can then help mobilize a feminist politics that engages and challenges the state to see how the interdependence of giving and receiving care, of production and social reproduction might elicit new policy frameworks (Elias and Rai 2019). Thus, the post-conflict phase could enable the distribution of resources through economic reform including greater social expenditure on “decent work” creation and care as well as stronger regulation of the labor market and human resource management policies for employees with caring responsibilities rather than reliance on feminized migration and remittance flows (for the potential in the Sri Lanka case, see Davies and True 2019). In many respects, these ideas are the antithesis to most post-conflict development strategies that emphasize power transitions among elites representing armed groups and distributing authority and resources accordingly (North, Willis, and Weingast 2009).

The regenerative state can be supported rather than obstructed by international actors and policy frameworks. The SDG provide a framework that can be used to develop gender-sensitive policies by the regenerating state. For example, regeneration could involve gender-responsive and inclusive reform by providing social infrastructure to support gender equality (SDG 5) and participation (SDG 16), and decent work (SDG 8) opportunities for women as an integral part of post-conflict transitions. However, as feminist scholars have pointed out, the SDG emphasis on growth as development continues to underline the international development regime’s neglect of the care economy (Esquivel, 2016; Rai, Brown and Ruwanpura 2019). Fukuda-Parr argues that
“while the SDGs promise the potential for a more transformative agenda, implementation will depend on continued advocacy on each of the targets to hold authorities to account” (Fukuda-Parr 2016, 43). Also, women’s participation in peacebuilding could be explicitly targeted as a marker of stability and peace, and women’s realization of economic and social rights could become an end in itself, enabling broader prosperity and lasting peace. At present, however, the IFIs are driven by an instrumental rather than rights-based approach; they are prioritizing gender equality interventions as “smart economics” because these interventions deliver on the core goals of eradicating poverty and promoting growth.

Conclusion

Post-conflict transitions provide an opportunity to promote positive norms around nonviolence, to recalibrate the allocation of labor in the household, and to improve the access to key resources such as health and education. By bringing together two frames of feminist scholarship—DSR and PEVAV—in this article, we have argued that the rebuilding of societies begins with and within households to enable a social transformation in power relations. We have examined how the post-conflict context can be seen as a moment of openness wherein reimagining a regenerative state can redress depletion and violence as part of securing peace and stability. Focusing on social reproduction and the depletion of those performing it under conditions affected by conflict highlights the need for the urgent prioritization of social infrastructures to reverse depletion.

Feminist analysis plays a vital role in mapping the structural barriers to regeneration, promoting greater attention to women’s unrecognized and uncounted labor and to women’s participation and rights in post-conflict environments. This evidence may inform more gender-sensitive and inclusive reform plans and aims to formalize this labor by providing social infrastructure to support gender equality and decent work opportunities for women as an integral part of the transition to peace. Four aspects are important. First, we need to revision the gender divisions of labor in societies recovering from conflict that keep women from participating in peace processes and that reinforce the structural gender inequalities causing or exacerbating gender-based violence and enabling militarized masculinities and the normalization of violence. Second, we need to recognize women’s social reproductive activities in the household and community during conflict and how they respond to individual and community humanitarian needs, and support the transition of women’s agency to shape and rebuild social infrastructure and services after conflict. Third, we need to analyze the gendered impact of peace implementation and post-conflict economic reform plans, and promote the obligations of state and external actors to ensure the social
and economic rights of post-conflict citizens. Finally, by holding the state and the international governance regime to account we can address the depletion of women’s lives in post-conflict contexts and their vulnerability to violence. Such a four-fold transformation requires the development of a regenerative politics that sets forth new policy and economic frameworks at community, national, and international levels. These frameworks should recognize the value of social reproduction and establish social infrastructures to sustain this as an integral part of securing peace and rebuilding economies.

Notes

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Funding

J.T. acknowledges the support of the Australian Research Council Future Fellowship Scheme [140101201] for supporting the research analyzed in this article.

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