

Gender as a cause of violent conflict

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Does gender cause violent conflict? In his classic study *Man, the state, and war*, Kenneth Waltz famously suggests that treating gender as a cause of war would be reductionist because it pertains to the individual level of analysis. If the women of Athens had gone on a sex strike (as suggested in Aristophanes's play), this would have done nothing to keep the men from going to war.¹ But feminist International Relations (IR) scholars have pushed back on this suggestion, insisting that gender is a relevant analytical concept for security studies.² Indeed, the question of the relationship of war and gender has animated feminist IR from its beginnings. From Jean Elshtain's identification of the seductions of war around the figures of the feminine 'beautiful soul' and the masculine 'just warrior' in political discourses throughout the centuries, to Cynthia Enloe's warnings about the everyday militarization of women's lives, Betty Reardon's identification of the imbrications of sexism in the 'war system' and Sara Ruddick's proposal to draft women in the interests of peace, this scholarship has convincingly shown connections between gender and war.³

But the lingering question of whether these connections can be described as *causal* has remained, entangled in long-standing debates in the social sciences about how to make causal claims given the complexity of social phenomena and the impossibility of an Archimedean foundation from which to establish truth.⁴ On the one hand, positivist feminists have embraced causal arguments, seeking to identify

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¹ Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the state, and war: a theoretical analysis*, revised edn (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001) [first edn published in 1959], p. 17.

² Laura Sjoberg, 'Gender, structure, and war: what Waltz couldn't see,' *International Theory* 4: 1, 2012, pp. 1–38, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S175297191100025X>.

³ Cynthia Enloe, *Does khaki become you?: the militarisation of women's lives* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1983); Betty Reardon, *Sexism and the war system* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1985); Sara Ruddick, 'Pacifying the forces: drafting women in the interests of peace,' *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 8: 3, 1983, pp. 471–89, <https://doi.org/10.1086/493986>.

⁴ J. Ann Tickner, 'What is your research program? Some feminist answers to International Relations methodological questions,' *International Studies Quarterly* 49: 1, 2005, pp. 1–22, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0020-8833.2005.00332.x>; Mary Caprioli, 'Feminist IR theory and quantitative methodology: a critical analysis,' *International Studies Review* 6: 2, 2004, pp. 253–69, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1521-9488.2004.00398.x>.

explanatory variables and patterns across contexts. Employing large-n studies, this scholarship has demonstrated, at the macro level, that gender inequality is correlated with a tendency to solve conflicts violently,⁵ and scholars have drawn on evidence from public opinion research, biology and developmental psychology to explain this connection by reference to intrinsic attitudes, evolution and the socialized behaviours of women and men.⁶ On the other hand, postpositivist scholarship has tended to embrace an understanding of gender as socially constructed and performatively productive/produced, and rarely employs the language of causation. Rather than treating gender relations or gender inequality as causes of war, it engages with the complex entanglements of gender with violent conflict, including, for example, the way gender structures militias, militaries and combat;⁷ generates militarized and other identities;⁸ or informs practices of peacebuilding.⁹ It explores the (re)production of gender (often in intersection with other status markers), its performative effects and the way it co-constitutes the war/peace binary. To the extent that this scholarship makes causal arguments, it embraces a notion of constitutive causation rather than probing the antecedents of violent conflict.

In this article, I want to revisit the question of whether gender is causally linked to violent conflict in a way that does not reduce understandings of gender to women and men or gender equality, and that takes advantage of insights from post-structuralist theorizing. My hope is that highlighting gender as a cause of conflict dynamics can inform policy practices, and in particular ongoing efforts of mainstreaming gender into peacebuilding as envisaged in the UN's Women, Peace and Security agenda. These efforts have difficulty incorporating insights from constructivist and post-structuralist feminist theorizing on the way violence is entangled with gender and intersecting markers of difference, such as sexuality, class, race and ethnicity. As a result, they have tended to narrowly

⁵ Mary Caprioli, 'Primed for violence: the role of gender inequality in predicting internal conflict', *International Studies Quarterly* 49: 2, 2005, pp. 161–78, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0020-8833.2005.00340.x>; Valerie M. Hudson, Mary Caprioli, Bonnie Ballif-Spanvill, Rose McDermott and Chad F. Emmett, 'The heart of the matter: the security of women and the security of states', *International Security* 33: 3, 2009, pp. 7–45, <https://doi.org/10.1162/isec.2009.33.3.7>; Erika Forsberg and Louise Olsson, 'Gender inequality and internal conflict', in *Oxford research encyclopedia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Theodora-Ismene Gizelis, 'A country of their own: women and peacebuilding', *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 28: 5, 2011, pp. 522–42, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0738894211418412>; Erik Melander, 'Gender equality and intrastate armed conflict', *International Studies Quarterly* 49: 4, 2005, pp. 695–714, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2478.2005.00384.x>.

⁶ Hudson et al., 'The heart of the matter'; Mary Caprioli and Mark A. Boyer, 'Gender, violence and international crisis', *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 45: 4, 2001, pp. 503–18, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002701045004005>.

⁷ For example, Maria Rashid, 'Precarious attachments: soldiers and erasures of the feminine in the Pakistan military', *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 24: 4, 2022, pp. 544–63, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2021.1995460>; Katharine M. Millar and Joanna Tidy, 'Combat as a moving target: masculinities, the heroic soldier myth, and normative martial violence', *Critical Military Studies* 3: 2, 2017, pp. 142–60, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23337486.2017.1302556>.

⁸ For example, Laura Sjoberg, *Women as wartime rapists: beyond sensation and stereotyping* (New York: NYU Press, 2016); Linda Åhäll, *Sexing war/policing gender: motherhood, myth and women's political violence* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015).

⁹ For example, Maria Martin de Almagro and Pol Bargaúes, 'A feminist opening of resilience: Elizabeth Grosz, Liberian peace huts and IR critiques', *Journal of International Relations and Development* vol. 25, 2022, pp. 967–92, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41268-022-00264-0>; Wening Udasmoro and Rahel Kunz, 'Art-for-Peace in Ambon: an intersectional reading', *International Development Policy | Revue Internationale de Politique de Développement* vol. 13, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.4000/poldev.4630>.

focus on protecting women and on increasing women's participation in liberal state-building and post-war reconstruction. Conversely, they have developed few arguments and interventions for conflict prevention that incorporate insights about entanglements of gender, sex, race and violence.¹⁰ Part of the problem is constituted in positivist styles of knowing that continue to dominate in some policy fields and that expect science to provide solutions to policy problems based on the causes identified. This article is thus based on a wager that showing how gender operates as a cause will facilitate an incorporation of insights from feminist theorizing into existing policy processes in a way that takes seriously gender both as a social construct and as a relation of power.¹¹

The article links to literature in the field of political science that finds the causes of civil wars in identities, group motivations and political cleavages (typically along the lines of ethnicity and religion), sometimes connecting them with 'private' motivations anchored in the politics of communities and families.¹² Despite thus focusing the analysis on the micro level, this literature pays little attention to the role of gender in dynamics of violence.¹³ The article also seeks to add to literatures on conflict transformation and critical security studies that recognize the relevance of social practices and the everyday, and that foreground conflict dynamics and consequently blur the boundaries of war and peace.¹⁴ Feminists have made important contributions to this literature, including through the introduction of the concept of a 'continuum of violence'. They argue that intersectional inequalities in 'peacetime' often escalate into violence, and that gender-based violence during armed conflict rarely ends once the fighting stops.¹⁵

¹⁰ Judy El-Bushra, 'How should we explain the recurrence of violent conflict and what might gender have to do with it?', in Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, Naomi Cahn, Dina Francesca Haynes and Nahla Valji., eds, *The Oxford handbook of gender and conflict*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 48–61.

¹¹ For a similar reconstructive exercise to explain conflict-related sexual violence, see Kirsten Campbell, 'Producing knowledge in the field of sexual violence in armed conflict research: objects, methods, politics, and gender justice methodology', *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society* 25: 4, 2018, pp. 469–95, <https://doi.org/10.1093/sp/jxy025>; Sara E. Davies and Jacqui True, 'Reframing conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence: bringing gender analysis back in', *Security Dialogue* 46: 6, 2015, pp. 495–512, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010615601389>.

¹² Charles King, 'The micropolitics of social violence', *World Politics* 56: 3, 2004, pp. 431–55, <https://doi.org/10.1353/wp.2004.0016>; Stathis N. Kalyvas, 'The ontology of "political violence": action and identity in civil wars', *Perspectives on Politics* 1: 3, 2003, pp. 475–94, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592703000355>; Ashutosh Varshney, *Ethnic conflict and civic life: Hindus and Muslims in India*, second revised edn (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003).

¹³ A notable exception is Elisabeth Wood's discussion of 'wartime transformations' during civil war that identifies a transformation of gender roles among other social processes during civil wars. Elisabeth Jean Wood, 'The social processes of civil war: the wartime transformation of social networks', *The Annual Review of Political Science* vol. 11, 2008, pp. 539–61, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.8.082103.104832>. Like feminist IR scholars more broadly, Wood also brings into view a range of violent actions beyond battle deaths, including sexual and gender-based violence. Elisabeth Jean Wood, 'Rape as a practice of war: toward a typology of political violence', *Politics & Society* 46: 4, 2018, pp. 513–37, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0032329218773710>.

¹⁴ Laura McLeod and Maria O'Reilly, 'Critical peace and conflict studies: feminist interventions', *Peacebuilding* 7: 2, 2019, pp. 127–45, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21647259.2019.1588457>; Louis Kriesberg and Bruce Dayton, *Constructive conflicts: from escalation to resolution* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012).

¹⁵ Annick T. R. Wibben et al., 'Collective discussion: piecing-up feminist peace research', *International Political Sociology* 13: 1, 2019, pp. 86–107, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ips/oly034>; Davies and True, 'Reframing conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence'; Cynthia Cockburn, 'Gender relations as causal in militarization and war: a feminist standpoint', *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 12: 2, 2010, pp. 139–57, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616741003665169>.

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In the following I propose that gender, in intersection with other axes of differentiation, operates as a driver of conflict dynamics. I introduce the concept of social mechanisms, which allows me to bring into view the productive force of gender, although this marker of inequality is typically coded as non-political in the mainstream conflict literature. The article is organized as follows: the first section introduces the concept of social mechanisms and reformulates it to become compatible with constructivist and post-structuralist understandings of the productivity and performativity of gender. The second section develops the notion of ‘intersectionally gendered mechanisms’ as causal drivers of conflict and relates it to feminist theorizing and a pragmatist understanding of causation. Finally, I draw on existing feminist literature to identify three exemplary intersectionally gendered mechanisms driving conflict: masculinist protection, masculinist competition and gendered mobilization for survival.

Causal mechanisms¹⁶

Mechanisms are frequently described as intermediary constructs between covering-law propositions at one extreme and pure description at the other. Scholars have suggested that they provide explanations for outcomes and can be thought of as causal in that they transform an input into an output—a trigger into an effect. They are the answer to questions of ‘how’. How—that is, by what generative force—was a certain effect brought about? Mechanisms thus capture processes; they trace the logic of events in the making.

Some positivist scholarship has embraced the identification of mechanisms because it allows it to specify causes that underlie correlations. Yet there are different understandings of what mechanisms are. Some have suggested that they break down broad processes into a succession of micro-level events at a lower level of analysis.¹⁷ But ultimately this technique would reduce mechanisms to no more than descriptions at an ever more detailed scale, reformulating them into intermediary variables. Other treatments avoid this trap by suggesting that mechanisms connect aggregate outcomes to individual-level actions.¹⁸ This framing is particularly salient among rational choice theorists who thus reduce the explanatory power of mechanisms to individual rationality. The classic example is the market: individual-level choices generate aggregate equilibria and, vice versa, market patterns can be explained by recurring back to rational actors. The equivalent example for sociologists is the self-fulfilling prophecy, originally introduced

¹⁶ The following discussion develops the argument made in Elisabeth Prügl, ‘Social mechanisms: a methodological tool for feminist IR’, in Harry Gould, ed., *The art of world making: Nicholas Greenwood Onuf and his critics* (London: Routledge, 2017), pp. 160–71.

¹⁷ See for example Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, *Case studies and theory development in the social sciences* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005).

¹⁸ Gianluca Manzo, ‘Analytical sociology and its critics’, *European Journal of Sociology* 51: 1, 2010, pp. 129–70, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003975610000056>; Andrew Abbott, ‘Mechanisms and relations’, *Sociologica* vol. 2, 2007, pp. 1–22, <https://www.rivisteweb.it/doi/10.2383/24750>; Peter Hedstrom and Richard Swedberg, ‘Social mechanisms’, *Acta Sociologica* 39: 3, 1996, pp. 281–308, <https://doi.org/10.1177/000169939603900302>. (Unless otherwise noted at point of citation, all URLs cited in this article were accessible on 30 June 2023.)

by Robert Merton: a bank failure (the aggregate event) can be explained by the choices of many individuals who, following a rumour that the bank is failing, decide to withdraw their funds and cause the bank to fail as a result.

In both of these examples the explanation reverts back to instrumentally rational individual action. But scholars also have theorized mechanisms as social, in the sense that they result from psychological processes or socialized agency. For example, Jon Elster introduces the psychological mechanism of 'sour grapes' to describe a situation in which someone reacts to the fact that they cannot get a job that they previously found desirable by no longer wanting the job.¹⁹ And Jeffrey Checkel proposes the mechanism of socialization in order to explain the identity effects of European integration.²⁰ While thus moving beyond instrumental rationality, individual agency remains the starting point for the mechanisms identified, with the agents following either a logic of consequence or a logic of appropriateness, to use the language of James March and Johan Olsen.²¹

But there are also less individualistic (arguably more truly social) conceptualizations of social mechanisms. Charles Tilly adds environmental and relational mechanisms to the more typical cognitive mechanisms described in the literature.²² Neil Gross suggests a pragmatic approach to mechanisms that locates them in social practices, in the interplay of habits and creativity.²³ And Benjamin Banta introduces a discursive approach to the topic, which leads him to argue that social mechanisms should be thought of as having 'dispositional properties ... that, when activated within a system, generate events'.²⁴

These sociological conceptions of social mechanisms resonate with constructivist and post-structuralist approaches in gender studies and provide a bridge to introducing gender as a dynamic force in social mechanisms. In the following I seek to develop the concept of intersectionally gendered mechanisms based on a social ontology that does justice to core commitments in feminist theorizing.

Intersectionally gendered mechanisms: theoretical building blocks

In order for the concept of intersectionally gendered mechanisms to be useful for feminist arguments, it needs to incorporate core insights from gender studies. These include the ideas that gender is constructed and malleable, that it produces

¹⁹ Jon Elster, *Nuts and bolts for the social sciences* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

²⁰ Jeffrey T. Checkel, 'Tracing causal mechanisms', *International Studies Review*, 8: 2, 2006, pp. 362–70, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2486.2006.00598_2.x.

²¹ James G. March and Johan P. Olsen, 'The new institutionalism: organizational factors in political life', *American Political Science Review* 78: 3, pp. 734–49, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1961840>.

²² Charles Tilly, 'Social boundary mechanisms', *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 34: 2, 2004, pp. 211–36, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0048393103262551>; Charles Tilly, 'Mechanisms in political processes', *Annual Review of Political Science* vol. 4, 2001, pp. 21–41, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.4.1.21>.

²³ Neil Gross, 'A pragmatist theory of social mechanisms', *American Sociological Review* 74: 3, 2009, pp. 358–79, <https://doi.org/10.1177/000312240907400302>. This links to Bourdieu's notion of a habitus, which indicates a logic of transformation rather than structuralist reproduction. See Didier Bigo, 'Pierre Bourdieu and International Relations: power of practices, practices of power', *International Political Sociology* 5: 3, pp. 225–58 at p. 243, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-5687.2011.00132.x>.

²⁴ Benjamin Banta, 'Analysing discourse as a causal mechanism', *European Journal of International Relations* 19: 2, 2013, pp. 379–402, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066111428970>.

identities, interests and social realities, and that it invariably intersects with other axes of differentiation. They also include the feminist methodological insight that any knowledge is situated and represents a ‘partial perspective’.²⁵ This section further develops these propositions.

The dispositional properties of gender

Feminist theories offer a rich tool chest for exploring how gender propels violent conflict through social mechanisms—that is, how it operates as a driver in such mechanisms. In the following, I survey approaches that have been picked up in the literature on gender and conflict and schematically group them into three categories, according to whether they focus on 1) gender relations, 2) gender identities, or 3) gender discourses and performativities.²⁶ These categorizations roughly correspond to structuralist, constructivist and post-structuralist forms of feminist theorizing, and they entail different understandings of the work gender does.²⁷

Typically, *structuralist*-inclined feminists have looked at patriarchy as a driver of violence, and although they tend to operate at the macro level, they invite process-oriented understandings. Cynthia Cockburn’s highly influential theorization of gender relations as a cause of militarization and war is a good example.²⁸ Distilling insights from feminist anti-war activists, Cockburn proposes that patriarchal gender relations ‘predispose our societies to war. They are a driving force perpetuating war. They are among the *causes* of war’.²⁹ Cockburn’s theory is complex. It recognizes that the causes of militarization and war are multiple, entailing intersectionally linked systems of economic, ethnic/national and gender power that are intrinsically violent. Distinguishing between immediate, antecedent and root causes, she suggests that patriarchal gender relations should be thought of as root causes, that is, as providing favourable conditions for militarization and war. What Cockburn has in mind here is a notion of constitutive causation that brings into view the ‘cultures’ and ‘social relations’ that ‘make war thinkable’.³⁰ Some of the literature on sexual violence similarly identifies structures as its causes, with some scholars highlighting domestic institutions, others linking sexual violence to the

²⁵ Donna Haraway, ‘Situated knowledges: the science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective’, *Feminist Studies* 14: 3, 1988, pp. 575–99, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3178066>.

²⁶ I exclude here the effort of Hudson et al. (‘The heart of the matter’) to theorize the relationship between gender relations and violence as functional, emerging from evolutionary processes, diffusing throughout societies, and replicated by processes of social learning. The approach does not explicitly embrace feminist theorizing, disregards the malleability of gender constructs, and treats women and men as universal and ahistorical categories. It thus is outside the understanding of feminist theory embraced in this article.

²⁷ See also Elisabeth Prügl et al., eds, ‘Gender in peacebuilding: local practices in Indonesia and Nigeria’, *International Development Policy/Revue internationale de politique de développement* vol. 13, 2021, <https://journals.openedition.org/poldev/4494>.

²⁸ Note that Cockburn herself identifies her type of feminism as ‘social constructionist’ (Cockburn, ‘Gender relations as causal in militarization and war’, p. 143), by which she means that she sees gender as a social construct. However, I would argue, her theory of war is ultimately structuralist, drawing on the notion of patriarchy as a system—even if historically variable and internally contradictory, highlighting the ‘sexual division of war’ (p. 145).

²⁹ Cockburn, ‘Gender relations as causal in militarization and war’, p. 140, emphasis in the original.

³⁰ Cockburn, ‘Gender relations as causal in militarization and war’, pp. 149–50.

global political economy, and yet others pointing to the liberal state system and its neo-imperialism in the name of humanitarianism.³¹

Structures do not determine in Cockburn's understanding; rather, they need to be enacted, and she encourages empirical work to document how the 'cyclical or spiralling life' of the 'war system' is enmeshed in gender relations.³² But Cockburn's theory operates at the macro level and ultimately has little to say about the way gender propels the processes she identifies as constituting the war system. She resorts to the notion of militarization in order to begin to identify an explanation: militarization is both an outcome of interlinked systems of power (including patriarchy) and a driver of violence and war. Militarization thus takes on the character of a causal mechanism in which gender relations play a supporting role. But, could one imagine militarization as powered by gender relations, as gender relations providing the dispositional properties of militarization?

A second, broadly adopted theorization of gender in feminist security studies is *constructivist* and suggests that norms and identities prescribe particular ways of 'doing gender'.³³ Squarely focused on the micro level, the key concepts of this approach are masculinities and femininities, that is the social constructions of gender identities in particular contexts. The generative force of gender in these theories derives from the fact that performing masculinity or femininity in a right or wrong way receives social sanctioning, and that agents see themselves as accountable to social expectations. Feminist theorists have considered masculinity and femininity as mutually constitutive, with multiple incarnations of femininity propping up what it means to be a man.³⁴ They also have argued that within social organizations one form of masculinity is often celebrated and becomes hegemonic, subordinating other forms of masculinity, thus suggesting that not only femininities but also masculinities are plural.³⁵

This theoretical apparatus has spawned a vibrant literature that has explored the way masculinities are associated with militarism and warlike behaviour. Some have sought to produce seemingly universal lists of traits associated with hegemonic/military/militarized masculinity, including toughness, aggressiveness, suppression of emotion, risk-taking, discipline and obedience. But critics have warned against reifying masculinities as invariably toxic and against disregarding differences across contexts,³⁶ and they have emphasized that hegemonic

³¹ Sara Meger, *Rape loot pillage: the political economy of sexual violence in armed conflict* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); Davies and True, 'Reframing conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence'; Dubravka Žarkov, 'Ontologies of international humanitarian and criminal law: "locals" and "internationals" in discourses and practices of justice', in Dubravka Žarkov and Marlies Glasius, eds, *Narratives of justice in and out of the courtroom: former Yugoslavia and beyond* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2014), pp. 3–21, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-04057-8>.

³² Cockburn, 'Gender relations as causal in militarization and war', p. 149.

³³ Candace West and Don H. Zimmerman, 'Doing gender', *Gender & Society* 1: 2, 1987, pp. 125–51, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243287001002002>; Judith Lorber and Susan A. Farrell, *The social construction of gender* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 1990).

³⁴ Simone de Beauvoir, *The second sex*, trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier, first Vintage Books edn (New York: Vintage Books, 2011) [first edn published in 1949].

³⁵ R. W. Connell, *Gender and power: society, the person, and sexual politics* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987).

³⁶ Kimberly Hutchings, 'Making sense of masculinity and war', *Men and Masculinities* 10: 4, 2007,

masculinity should be treated as an ideal that men are invited to aspire to rather than as something that attaches to powerful men.³⁷ Masculinities and femininities are then understood as ongoing accomplishments, and the explanation for violence lies not in traits acquired through socialization, but in the pressures and pathologies emerging from an unachievable ideal. Thus, David Duriesmith,³⁸ and Christine Chinkin, Mary Kaldor and Punam Yadav,³⁹ argue that ‘insecure masculinity’ and ‘protest masculinities’ of men who are too poor to live up to the ideal are central to understanding wanton forms of violence characteristic of ‘new wars’.⁴⁰ Maria Eriksson Baaz and Maria Stern similarly show that perpetrators justify sexual violence on the background of their failure to live up to the expectation that men be economic providers or ‘sexually potent fighters’.⁴¹ Violence then emerges as a performance associated with proving masculinity and certain gender ideals/identities as disposing men towards violence. Conversely, making non-violent masculinities hegemonic becomes a strategy for preventing violent conflict.⁴² The constructivist approach in this way provides a micro-level understanding of gender identities as driving conflict dynamics.

A third set of feminist theorizing of gender as dispositional is *post-structuralist* and focuses on the way gender is both discursively productive and produced. It is produced in the sense that it establishes (unstable) identities (as also argued by constructivists), but it also is productive in the sense that it structures our understandings of the world along hierarchical binaries. Language is the core social medium through which gender receives this generative force for post-structuralists, and its predominant source lies in processes of othering and thus in the fact that gender is a binary. In security studies, feminists have drawn on post-structuralism to disrupt gender binaries and the way in which static understandings of sex prop up these binaries even among feminist constructivists. For example, Marysia Zalewski has pointed out that the association of masculinity with violence hides rather than constitutes violence (as for example, with regard to sexual violence against men) and questioned the degree to which masculinity remains attached to male bodies and binary thinking.⁴³ Considerable effort has also gone into show-

pp. 389–404, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X07306740>; R. W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, ‘Hegemonic masculinity: rethinking the concept’, *Gender & Society* 19: 6, 2005, pp. 829–59, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243205278639>.

³⁷ For example, J. Ann Tickner, *Gender in International Relations: feminist perspectives on achieving global security* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), p. 6.

³⁸ David Duriesmith, ‘Is manhood a causal factor in the shifting nature of war?’, *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 16: 2, 2014, pp. 236–54, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2013.773718>; David Duriesmith, *Masculinity and new war: the gendered dynamics of contemporary armed conflict* (London: Routledge, 2016).

³⁹ Christine Chinkin, Mary Kaldor and Punam Yadav, ‘Gender and new wars’, *Journal of International Affairs* 67: 1, 2013, pp. 167–87, <https://doi.org/10.5334/sta.733>.

⁴⁰ See also Jane L. Parpart, ‘Masculinity, gender and the “new wars”’, *NORMA* 5: 2, 2011, pp. 86–99, <https://doi.org/10.18261/ISSN1890-2146-2010-02-02>.

⁴¹ Maria Eriksson Baaz and Maria Stern, ‘Why do soldiers rape? Masculinity, violence, and sexuality in the armed forces in the Congo (DRC)’, *International Studies Quarterly* 53: 2, 2009, pp. 495–518, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2478.2009.00543.x>.

⁴² Rahel Kunz, Henri Myrntinen and Wening Udasmoro, ‘Preachers, pirates and peace-building: examining non-violent hegemonic masculinities in Aceh’, *Asian Journal of Women’s Studies* 24: 3, 2018, pp. 299–320, <https://doi.org/10.1080/12259276.2018.1495348>.

⁴³ Marysia Zalewski, ‘What’s the problem with the concept of military masculinities?’, *Critical Military Studies* 3: 2, 2017, pp. 200–05, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23337486.2017.1316480>.

ing that women participate in various forms of violence and that there are non-violent men.⁴⁴

The issue, then, is not the way (already constituted) men and women perform masculinity and femininity, but the way the gender binary lends meaning through processes of othering. For example, the argument that the meaning of 'combat' is established through the 'masculinity-defined mythologized figure of the heroic soldier' follows a post-structuralist mode of reasoning building on the productive force of the gender binary.⁴⁵ Similarly, Hutchings suggests that gender is to begin with an empty form that provides meaning to the war/peace dichotomy and 'cognitive shortcuts' to understanding war.⁴⁶ Post-structuralist forms of argument thus invite a shift towards recognizing the gender binary itself as productive, highlighting the ongoing dynamics of differentiation that lend themselves to process-oriented theorizing.

In sum, a diverse spectrum of theorizing in feminist security studies shows how gender yields dispositional properties in different ways. Explanations of violent conflict focus on patriarchal gender relations, gendered identity constructions, and processes of binary othering. Different theoretical formulations of gender imply different understandings of how gender is dynamic, that is, of how it operates to generate effects. Accordingly, when inserted into mechanisms they surface different insights and causalities. Before elaborating these more extensively, it is necessary to discuss the way gender dynamics intersect with other axes of differentiation.

Intersectionality

Most feminist theorists today agree that gender invariably operates in conjunction with other axes of social differentiation, and the concept of intersectionality describes this phenomenon. As discussed, Cockburn's exploration of the causes of war and militarization is intersectional, postulating linked systems of economic, ethnic/national and gender power. How would one theorize these drivers as intersectional in social mechanisms?

The political science literature seeking to explain civil wars highlights the relevance of ethnic fragmentation in channelling grievances. Explanations in this vein often trace the motivations of individuals based on ethnic identities, with the latter conceived as relatively static. In doing so, these explanations tend to become victims of what Rogers Brubaker has called 'groupism', that is, 'the tendency to

⁴⁴ Kunz, Myrntinen and Udasmoro, 'Preachers, pirates and peace-building'; Sjoberg, *Women as wartime rapists*; Ahäll, *Sexing war/policing gender*; Laura Sjoberg and Caron E. Gentry, eds, *Women, gender, and terrorism* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2011). For a critique of a focus on 'invisible subjects' as opposed to the constitution of subjects see Campbell, 'Producing knowledge in the field of sexual violence in armed conflict research'.

⁴⁵ Millar and Tidy, 'Combat as a moving target', p. 142; Maria Stern and Marysia Zalewski, 'Feminist fatigue(s), reflections on feminism and familiar fables of militarisation', *Review of International Studies* 35: 3, 2009, p. 611, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210509008675>.

⁴⁶ Hutchings, 'Making sense of masculinity and war'; Kimberly Hutchings, 'Cognitive shortcuts', in Jane L. Parpart and Marysia Zalewski, eds, *Rethinking the man question: sex, gender and violence in International Relations* (London: Zed Books, 2008), pp. 23–46.

treat various categories of people as if they were internally homogeneous, externally bounded groups, even unitary collective actors with common purposes'.⁴⁷ This precludes a processual understanding of the constitution of ethnicity, of the effects it produces and the way it operates in specific events beyond the governance of ethnic groups. It also, I would argue, precludes a dynamic understanding of the entanglements of ethnicity with gender and a consideration of the productive power of their intersections in conflict dynamics. A less static understanding of ethnicity, race, nationality and other markers of difference makes it possible to think of them as entangled with gender, interacting to become drivers of violent conflict.

The literature on intersectionality is helpful in this regard. When coining the term in the early 1990s, Kimberlé Crenshaw suggested that race and gender operated jointly in the everyday lives of black women, and that their experiences of exclusion needed to be examined from the perspective of this intersectional location, not as separate assertions of racism and sexism.⁴⁸ Since then, the concept of intersectionality has been applied to investigate dynamics in a wide range of topics, spawning debates about its practical and normative purposes, and about its status as a theory and methodology.⁴⁹ It has found critical resonance in post-colonial scholarship, where authors have highlighted the coloniality of pre-existing categories and insisted on the fact that intersections are contextual and historically grown.⁵⁰ Critiques have focused on the way researchers have turned the concept into a mechanically applied methodological grid, emptying it of its political force and, in the process, reifying race and gender in addition to other identity categories.⁵¹

In the project proposed here, I adopt the concept of intersectionality for explanatory, rather than normative, purposes, and I propose that intersectional explanations embrace constructivist and post-structuralist understandings of race, gender and other markers of difference. As outlined, various strands of feminist security studies foreground social relations, identity characteristics, or processes of othering—that is, they employ diverse understandings of social construction, and (as in the case of Cockburn and the literature on stymied masculinity) account for the way gender is entangled with race and class. These entangled constructions can

⁴⁷ Rogers Brubaker, 'Ethnicity, race, and nationalism', *Annual Review of Sociology* vol. 35, 2009, pp. 21–42 at p. 28, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-070308-115916>.

⁴⁸ Kimberlé Crenshaw, 'Mapping the margins: intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color', *Stanford Law Review* 43: 6, 1991, pp. 1241–99 at p. 1241, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039>.

⁴⁹ Sumi Cho, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw and Leslie McCall, 'Toward a field of intersectionality studies: theory, applications, and praxis', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 38: 4, 2013, pp. 785–810, <https://doi.org/10.1086/669608>; Ange-Marie Hancock, 'Intersectionality as a normative and empirical paradigm', *Politics and Gender* 3: 2, 2007, pp. 248–54, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X07000062>.

⁵⁰ Andréa Gill and Thula Pires, 'From binary to intersectional to imbricated approaches: gender in a decolonial and diasporic perspective', *Contexto Internacional* 41: 2, 2019, pp. 275–302, <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0102-8529.2019410200003>; Nivedita Menon, 'Is feminism about "women"? A critical view on intersectionality from India', *Economic and Political Weekly* 50: 17, 2015, pp. 37–44, <https://www.epw.in/journal/2015/17/perspectives/feminism-about-women.html>.

⁵¹ Gill and Pires, 'From binary to intersectional to imbricated approaches'; Jasbir K. Puar, "'I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess': becoming-intersectional in assemblage theory', *PhiloSOPHIA* 2: 1, 2012, pp. 49–66, <https://doi.org/10.1353/phi.2012.a486621>.

be theorized to lend mechanisms their causal force, intertwining processes such as gendering and racialization, and producing interactive effects.⁵²

Mechanisms and causes

Feminist standpoint theorists have argued that knowledge is always embodied, reflecting experiences, social locations and/or feminist consciousness.⁵³ While they diverge on what the basis may be of a standpoint, they agree that a focus on emancipation requires speaking from the perspective of the underprivileged. Criticized for underestimating intersectionality, contemporary standpoint literature has largely abandoned the idea that there could be a unitary women's standpoint and has embraced multiplicity. Donna Haraway's concept of 'situated knowing' has done much to free standpoint thinking from the idea that there needs to be a collective subject that knows, while retaining a bottom-up perspective and an intention to critique.⁵⁴

The feminist commitment to situated knowing has implications for how we should think of causality. Indeed, many scholars argue that social mechanisms provide a connection between micro- and macro-phenomena—either linking macro-phenomena back to micro-actions (as in the run on the banks) or tracing phenomena in the everyday world to social mechanisms that are thought to have reality in abstract social structures. The latter is the case for critical realists who, for example, conceptualize gender, race and other markers of difference as abstractions that have reality independent of their enactments.⁵⁵ The image favoured in these explanations is of the empirical world as an open system characterized by multi-causality and causal complexity.⁵⁶

⁵² Hae Yeon Choo and Myra Marx Ferree, 'Practicing intersectionality in sociological research: a critical analysis of inclusions, interactions, and institutions in the study of inequalities', *Sociological Theory* 28: 2, 2010, pp. 129–49, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9558.2010.01370.x>. Note that the notion of intersectional mechanisms is different from a notion of multiple causation, which either designates identity attachments as independent causes or recognizes that multiple mechanisms may be operative at once. Rather the concept pinpoints how norms, identity attachments and operations of difference become entangled in lending dispositional force to social mechanisms.

⁵³ Sandra G. Harding, ed., *The feminist standpoint theory reader: intellectual and political controversies* (London: Psychology Press, 2004); Nancy Hartsock, *The feminist standpoint revisited and other essays* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998).

⁵⁴ Haraway, 'Situated knowledges'.

⁵⁵ Lena Gunnarsson, Angela Martinez Dy and Michiel van Ingen, 'Critical realism, gender and feminism: exchanges, challenges, synergies', *Journal of Critical Realism* 15: 5, 2016, pp. 433–9, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14767430.2016.1211442>; Lena Gunnarsson, 'A defence of the category "women"', *Feminist Theory* 12: 1, 2011, pp. 23–37, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464700110390604>. Postpositivist realist feminists seek to overcome the reification of categories implied in the idea that gender is an abstraction by introducing the notion of a (negative) dialectic between 'the real' and that which has been constructed. Yet, this move does not address the feminist commitment to situated knowing with its focus on difference and knowing otherwise. Laura Gillman, 'Critical realist and postpositivist realist feminisms: towards a feminist dialectical realism', *Journal of Critical Realism* 15: 5, 2016, pp. 458–75, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14767430.2016.1191005>. Elmar Flatschart, 'Feminist standpoints and critical realism. The contested materiality of difference in intersectionality and new materialism', *Journal of Critical Realism* 16: 3, 2017, pp. 284–302, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14767430.2017.1313650>.

⁵⁶ Milja Kurki, *Causation in International Relations: reclaiming causal analysis* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Mario Bunge, 'How does it work?: The search for explanatory mechanisms', *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 34: 2, 2004, pp. 182–210, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0048393103262550>.

Systemic reasoning of this sort stands in tension with the idea of situated knowing because it holds on to the idea of a universal truth that can be recovered in the structures of the system. Yet, this does not invalidate a systems approach entirely. Indeed, Cockburn's theory of gender as causal for war and militarization introduces patriarchy, capitalism and ethnonationalism as linked systems of power and insists that they need to be thought intersectionally at the systemic level. Moreover, she gets to this argument from the standpoint of peace activists. Cockburn's methodology thus leads her to argue that social, economic and political structures become meaningful in situated contexts.

Cockburn's dual commitment to systems and context raises the question of how we should think of causation. The notion of mechanisms moves away from the idea that causation requires the identification of patterns in which two events are regularly associated with each other so that they can be related analytically. Rather, critical realists argue, causes are to be found in linking the empirical world to a structured reality that may not be directly observable, but that brings phenomena into being through the operations of mechanisms. Although this clearly was not her intention, one could interpret Cockburn's arguments as following the logic of critical realism. However, there is one caveat: critical realism ignores the partiality of knowing that is central to Cockburn's scholarship.

A pragmatist understanding of causation can provide a way out of this contradiction in two ways. First, pragmatists do not distinguish between abstract causes and the reasons people provide for why something is happening. Like feminists, they privilege people's reasoning and validate the way people use the concept of cause in order to explain things that happen in their everyday lives.⁵⁷ As Cockburn shows, this may entail an identification of structures, but rather than treating these as real, a pragmatist notion of causation would be able to accept the structures identified as a partial kind of knowledge, one that makes sense for particular contexts.

Second, a pragmatist notion of causation assesses the validity of identified causes against their usefulness for social purposes. This notion of 'final causation' suggests that, rather than constituting antecedents, causes should be read through their effects. They should thus be identified from the perspective of outcomes, because the purpose of gaining knowledge is to be able to intervene in the world in order to produce change. Some in the pragmatist tradition go so far to suggest that manipulability should be a criterion for assessing the validity of a cause. Knowing causes from the perspective of their outcomes then makes things controllable, and a cause becomes 'whatever event, process, thing, power, condition, which human agents can control in order to produce or prevent another state of affairs (their "effect")'.⁵⁸ A focus on manipulability may run the risk of formulating simplistic solutions; however, the pragmatist notion of final causation is attractive from a feminist perspective because it allows for a foregrounding of situated knowledge

⁵⁷ Gross, 'A pragmatist theory of social mechanisms'; Kurki, *Causation in International Relations*; Donald Davidson, 'Actions, reasons, and causes', *The Journal of Philosophy* 60: 23, 1963, pp. 685–700, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2023177>.

⁵⁸ Kurki, *Causation in International Relations*, p. 152.

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interests. The value of causal explanations employing social mechanisms would then have to be judged against their value for feminist purposes.

A feminist and pragmatist reformulation of causal mechanisms tempers explanatory ambitions. It invites causal storylines that are contextually situated and that foreground practicality without simplifying the complexity of social and political life. Identifying social mechanisms in this way does not allow for prediction because the same social mechanism may generate different outcomes in different contexts. Moreover, even in the same context multiple mechanisms tend to operate in parallel and may cancel each other out, as systems theorists argue. But identifying social mechanisms allows for generalization in a different way: it enables a type of practical insight that Ned Lebow has characterized as 'forecasting', that is, it helps in developing open-ended storylines that can guide the necessarily political work of deciding what is to be done.⁵⁹ Forecasting shifts the role of researchers *vis-à-vis* practitioners: their role is no longer to provide answers and solutions, but to help develop likely alternative scenarios.

In sum, the concept of intersectionally gendered mechanisms draws on different strands of intersectional feminist theorizing in order to enable causal arguments. Regardless of whether gender and race are thought of as social relations, identities or operations of othering, they activate dispositions and move processes in particular directions and not in others. Recognizing the dispositional force of intersecting constructions of difference allows for the identification of causal mechanisms, for a limited degree of generalization about these causes, and for the development of alternative scenarios that can inform policy interventions. The next section draws on existing feminist analyses of violent conflict to introduce some intersectionally gendered mechanisms and illustrate these arguments.

Explaining conflict dynamics

Feminist security studies have identified a range of gendered conflict dynamics that lend themselves to being formulated as intersectionally gendered mechanisms. I draw on this literature to elaborate three mechanisms: masculinist protection, masculinist competition and gendered mobilization for survival. These are by no means the only ones that could be found in the literature or identified empirically. My reasons for selecting them are twofold. First, they help me illustrate the ways in which varying intersections (of gender, race, sexuality and indigeneity) operate and interact. Second, they also help me demonstrate how the three understandings of gender introduced earlier surface different kinds of causal explanations.

Mechanism 1: masculinist protection

Perhaps one of the most influential ideas of the gender and conflict literature relates to the link between violence and gender identities, that is the construc-

⁵⁹ Richard Ned Lebow, *Constructing cause in International Relations* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

tion of masculinities and associated femininities. One version of this link can be described as a mechanism of masculinist protection that makes it possible to think of war as an honourable activity and a duty for male citizens. The identity construction underlying this mechanism opposes masculine ‘just warriors’ to feminine ‘beautiful souls’, and male protectors to women in need of protection and easily victimized.⁶⁰ When the security of the state is threatened men are called on to defend women and the homeland, triggering what Iris Marion Young has called the ‘logic’ of masculinist protection.⁶¹ While Elstain’s identification of gendered characters in war was based on political theory, Young located them in the situated context of a United States preparing for the invasion of Afghanistan. In this case the figures of Western political theory took on form in a local context. They also took on a racial tinge as US security discourse evoked the need for US soldiers to protect Afghan women from their violent men.

Beyond the US, the mechanism of masculinist protection has been observed in situations ranging from UN peacekeeping to right-wing vigilantism. Thus, scholars have identified it in the UN’s Women, Peace and Security agenda with its emphasis on protecting women in war-torn countries from sexual and gender-based violence, often seen to be perpetrated by barbaric brown men.⁶² And Sarai Aharoni and Élise Féron have highlighted it in the rhetoric of the anti-immigrant Soldiers of Odin, who are policing Finnish streets, in part in response to fears that ‘black men’ would harass or go out with Finnish ‘girls’.⁶³ In both instances, gendered and racialized identity constructions motivate protection logics and justify a muscled response. Constructions of gender provide the dispositions in this mechanism for using violence for the purpose of protection, which in this way operates as a cause.

Mechanism 2: masculinist competition

Feminist scholarship has suggested that performances of sovereignty, and nationalism in particular, are intrinsically heterosexist. State-making has been linked to establishing a symbolic order in which masculine and feminine subjectivities are codified as binary and heterosexism is established as natural.⁶⁴ It has activated othering processes that operate along the axes of gender and sexuality, in inter-

⁶⁰ Jean Bethke Elstain, ‘On beautiful souls, just warriors and feminist consciousness’, *Women’s Studies International Forum* 5: 3–4, 1982, pp. 341–8, [https://doi.org/10.1016/0277-5395\(82\)90043-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/0277-5395(82)90043-7); Judith Hicks Stiehm, ‘The protected, the protector, the defender’, *Women’s Studies International Forum* 5: 3–4, 1982, pp. 367–76, [https://doi.org/10.1016/0277-5395\(82\)90048-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/0277-5395(82)90048-6).

⁶¹ Iris Marion Young, ‘The logic of masculinist protection: reflections on the current security state’, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 29: 1, 2003, pp. 1–25, <https://doi.org/10.1086/375708>.

⁶² Nicola Pratt, ‘Reconceptualizing gender, reinscribing racial-sexual boundaries in international security: the case of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on “Women, Peace and Security”’, *International Studies Quarterly* 57: 4, 2013, pp. 772–83, <https://doi.org/10.1111/isqu.12032>; Heidi Hudson, ‘A double-edged sword of peace? Reflections on the tension between representation and protection in gendering liberal peacebuilding’, *International Peacekeeping* 19: 4, 2012, pp. 443–60, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13533312.2012.709753>.

⁶³ Sarai B. Aharoni and Élise Féron, ‘National populism and gendered vigilantism: the case of the Soldiers of Odin in Finland’, *Cooperation and Conflict* 55: 1, 2020, pp. 86–106, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010836719850207>.

⁶⁴ V. Spike Peterson, ‘Political identities/nationalism as heterosexism’, *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 1: 1, 1999, pp. 34–65, <https://doi.org/10.1080/146167499360031>.

section with race and other status markers, to create political communities and address anxieties over their biological and social reproduction. In this way, state-making establishes collective selves that are imagined as homogeneous and that are anchored in hegemonic forms of masculinity. Focusing on nationalism in particular, Koen Sloopmaeckers argues that in this way state-making becomes an enactment of competing masculinities and homophobia becomes a central element of efforts to secure hegemony. The national self is posed against internal and external Others whose masculinity it denies.⁶⁵

The phenomenon of conflict-related sexual violence provides a particularly good illustration of masculinist competition and the fuel it provides for stoking violent conflict. As Dubravka Žarkov argues in her analysis of the war in the former Yugoslavia, stories of sexual violence recounted in the media acted to jointly produce masculinity, sexual potency and ethnicity.⁶⁶ Sexualized stories of slights and bragging became the media through which the war was performed and competing masculinities were affirmed. More broadly, scholars have interpreted conflict-related sexual violence as men sending a message to men questioning their masculinity. The violation of 'their women' signals the individual and collective emasculation of the enemy, as does the violation of men (literally, in the case of castration) while it serves to masculinize the perpetrator.⁶⁷ In this sense, masculinist competition becomes a cause of sexual violence and war.

Mechanism 3: gendered mobilization for survival

An extensive literature documents a wave of land grabs in the new century that has generated often-violent expropriations undermining the livelihoods of displaced populations.⁶⁸ While seemingly recent, such processes reach back to colonialism and have continued with economic development, entailing a massive land dispossession of women, with property rights shifting to male heads of households, lineage chiefs and other male elites, and new gender divisions of labour aggravating women's economic dependence on men.⁶⁹ In the current phase of extractivist capitalism, land commercialization also has surfaced new cleavages such as

⁶⁵ Koen Sloopmaeckers, 'Nationalism as competing masculinities: homophobia as a technology of othering for hetero- and homonationalism', *Theory and Society* 48: 2, 2019, pp. 239–65, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11186-019-09346-4>.

⁶⁶ Dubravka Žarkov, *The body of war: media, ethnicity, and gender in the break-up of Yugoslavia* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

⁶⁷ Paula Drumond, 'Sex, violence, and heteronormativity: revisiting performances of sexual violence against men in former Yugoslavia', in Marysia Zalewski, Paula Drumond, Elisabeth Prügl and Maria Stern, eds, *Sexual violence against men in global politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 2018), pp. 152–66; Sjöberg, *Women as wartime rapists*; Sandesh Sivakumaran, 'Sexual violence against men in armed conflict', *European Journal of International Law* 18: 2, 2007, pp. 253–76, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ejil/chm013>; Inger Skjelsbaek, 'Sexual violence and war: mapping out a complex relationship', *European Journal of International Relations* 7: 2, 2001, pp. 211–37, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066101007002003>.

⁶⁸ Marc Edelman, Carlos Oya and Saturnino Borrás Jr, 'Global land grabs: historical processes, theoretical and methodological implications and current trajectories', *Third World Quarterly* 34: 9, 2013, pp. 1517–31, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2013.850190>.

⁶⁹ Michael Levien, 'Gender and land dispossession: a comparative analysis', *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 44: 6, 2017, pp. 1111–34, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2017.1367291>.

those between settlers and ‘indigenes’ in West Africa,⁷⁰ and Indigenous populations around the world have suffered particularly violent episodes of expropriation. As the value of land increases, existing land-use patterns come into question and conflict ensues over the authority to administer and sell land. Commercialization has thus sharpened inequality along the lines of gender, ethnicity, indigeneity and class, and it has been widely associated with violence.⁷¹

Not surprisingly, identities have become key vectors that frame the understanding of these conflicts and motivate claims and action. This is particularly visible in the widespread protests against land dispossession globally. Women today are leading anti-land grab protests in countries ranging from Cambodia and Indonesia to Ghana and Mozambique, and further to Brazil and Bolivia.⁷² In Cambodia, women have interpreted such protests as an extension of their reproductive labour, a mandate to maintain their homes as land loss threatens the forfeiture of their domiciles, their ability to grow food, and imperils old-age security which is anchored in the promise of passing down land.⁷³ Indigenous women have been particularly determined, emphasizing that ‘our lands are our lives’, thus highlighting the key role of land in securing social reproduction and survival.⁷⁴ In addition, Cambodian women have employed existing gender norms to develop repertoires of protest that resonate and amplify their message.⁷⁵ In this way, gender divisions of labour and gender norms have served to frame grievances, propelled mobilizations against the effects of land commercialization and shaped the dynamics of land conflicts. In the case of Cambodia, these mobiliza-

⁷⁰ Sara Berry, ‘Property, authority and citizenship: land claims, politics and the dynamics of social division in West Africa’, *Development and Change* 40: 1, pp. 23–45, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7660.2009.01504.x>.

⁷¹ Pauline E. Peters, ‘Inequality and social conflict over land in Africa’, *Journal of Agrarian Change* 4: 3, 2004, pp. 269–314, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-0366.2004.00080.x>; Berry, ‘Property, authority and citizenship’; Mathijs Van Leeuwen and Gemma Van Der Haar, ‘Theorizing the land–violent conflict nexus’, *World Development* vol. 78, 2016, pp. 94–104, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2015.10.011>; Frankline Ndi and Simon Batterbury, ‘Land grabbing and the axis of political conflicts: insights from southwest Cameroon’, *Africa Spectrum* 52: 1, 2017, pp. 33–63, <https://doi.org/10.1177/000203971705200102>.

⁷² Saba Joshi, ‘Gendered repertoires of contention: women’s resistance, authoritarian state formation, and land grabbing in Cambodia’, *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 24: 2, 2022, pp. 198–220, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2022.2053295>; Verónica Gago, *Feminist international: how to change everything* (London: Verso, 2020); Wening Udasmoro and Elisabeth Prügl, ‘“No matter what—I’ve got rights”: women’s land grab protests in Banyuwangi, East Java’, *International Development Policy/Revue internationale de politique de développement* vol. 13, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.4000/poldev.4655>; Gertrude Dzifa Torvikey, ‘Reclaiming our land and labour: women’s resistance to extractivist agriculture in south-eastern Ghana’, *Feminist Africa* 2: 1, 2021, pp. 49–70, https://feministafrica.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/fa_v2_issue1_Feature-article-Reclaiming-our-Land-and-Labour.pdf; Teresa Cunha and Isabel Casimiro, ‘“Cinderellas” of our Mozambique wish to speak: a feminist perspective on extractivism’, *Feminist Africa* 2: 1, 2021, pp. 71–98, https://feministafrica.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/fa_v2_issue1_Feature-article_Cinderellas_of-Our-Mozambique-Wish-to-Speak.pdf.

⁷³ Alice Beban and Joanna Bourke Martignoni, ‘Social security in the extractive state: gender, land inheritance, and agrarian change in Ratanakiri, Cambodia’, in Joanna Bourke Martignoni et al., eds, *Agricultural commercialization, gender equality and the right to food* (London and New York: Routledge, 2023), pp. 204–22; Clara Mi Young Park, ‘“Our lands are our lives”: gendered experiences of resistance to land grabbing in rural Cambodia’, *Feminist Economics*, 25: 4, 2018, pp. 1–24, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13545701.2018.1503417>; Clara Mi Young Park and Margherita Maffii, ‘“We are not afraid to die”: gender dynamics of agrarian change in Ratanakiri province, Cambodia’, *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 44: 6, 2017, pp. 1235–54, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2017.1384725>; Vanessa Lamb, Laura Schoenberger, Carl Middleton and Borin Un, ‘Gendered eviction, protest and recovery: a feminist political ecology engagement with land grabbing in rural Cambodia’, *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 44: 6, 2017, pp. 1215–34, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2017.1311868>.

⁷⁴ Park and Maffii, ‘“We are not afraid to die”’, p. 1249.

⁷⁵ Joshi, ‘Gendered repertoires of contention’.

tions have yielded minor remedies, an autocratic crackdown on civil society, and increased domestic violence against women protesters, who are seen to transgress patriarchal norms, lending the conflicts a specifically intimate dimension.⁷⁶ Thus, gender has operated not only as a core driver of the anti-land grab mobilizations, but also shaped the forms of violence the conflict has assumed.

Conclusion

The three highlighted mechanisms illustrate that gender does indeed operate as a cause in conflict dynamics. It does so by lending dispositional force to social mechanisms—here, protection, competition and mobilization. And it often does so in intersection with other status markers and structures of power. The mechanism of masculinist protection in the US emerged as gendered and racialized, the mechanism of masculinist competition added the dimension of sexuality, forcefully illustrated through the case of conflict-related sexual violence in Yugoslavia, and the mechanism of mobilization for survival in Cambodia operates along the axes of gender and class, and sometimes in intersection with indigeneity. Intersectional gendering does different work in these mechanisms: it draws on racialized constructions of masculinity and femininity in the mechanism of protection in order to authorize war; it motivates othering in dynamics of masculine competition in which violence becomes performative of ethnicity and heteronormative masculinity; and it spurs to action on the basis of gender divisions of labour and gender norms in (Indigenous) mobilizations for survival, triggering a backlash of gender-based violence.

I have introduced these intersectionally gendered mechanisms in order to provide causal explanations for dynamics of violent conflict. By showing similarities across cases, I have also suggested that explaining with intersectionally gendered mechanisms allows for a degree of generalization. Yet, such generalizations are limited in scope. Not all intersectionality gendered mechanisms do operate in every conflict, nor do they function in the same way when they can be discerned. This is so because constructions of gender and intersecting differences vary across societies and because intersectionally gendered mechanisms are likely to work in interaction with other situated mechanisms. Their explanatory power is thus anchored in contexts. Researchers seeking to make causal arguments with intersectionally gendered mechanisms will need to re-describe them in such contexts. Their generality pertains to their form, to the way they harness the forces of normativity, identity and difference, but their specific expressions are likely to be diverse. Yet, treating gender as a cause in the mode specified allows for acknowledging the powers of gendered structures, gender norms and othering in conflict dynamics, thereby rectifying the blindness to the causal force of gender in much of the existing literature on violent conflict. And unlike the quantitative

⁷⁶ Katherine Brickell, *Home SOS: gender, violence, and survival in crisis ordinary Cambodia* (Hoboken, NJ and Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2020); Katherine Brickell, “‘The whole world is watching’: intimate geopolitics of forced eviction and women’s activism in Cambodia”, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 104: 6, 2014, pp. 1256–72, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00045608.2014.944452>.

literature on gender and war, specifying these mechanisms helps to map causal pathways and in this way provide guidance for change.

Indeed, the main value of identifying intersectionally gendered mechanisms may lie in their pay-off for policy-making. They enable the distillation of meaningful practical knowledge for world-changing purposes, including for local efforts of peacebuilding and conflict prevention. Identifying them can help policy-oriented researchers develop instructive narratives that alert policy-makers and practitioners to inherent tendencies and propensities that may arise from the triggering of these mechanisms in a variety of contexts. Envisioning alternative scenarios that these tendencies may make possible can inform the political negotiations and deliberations at the heart of participatory forms of policy-making.

While this falls short of identifying a magic bullet to end war, it is also a far cry from simply adding women to existing institutions and interventions, an approach that continues to be the easy fallback for many policy agencies when called on to mainstream gender. Given international commitments to gender equality and to combating racism, it is important to develop knowledge that can advance these policy goals. My hope is that the concept of intersectionally gendered mechanisms can contribute to such knowledge, that researchers will pick up the concept and probe its value, and that the mechanisms they identify will enable policy-makers and practitioners as they manoeuvre gendered and racialized power relations in efforts to build more equitable and less violent futures.