



Intimate war

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ABSTRACT

Contending that domestic violence and modern international warfare are part of a single complex of violence, this paper identifies their shared intimate dynamics. Both violences operate through emotional and psychological registers that are as central to their effectiveness as incidents of direct physical harm. While these dynamics are intimate, they are present across scale, and read here through a feminist lens on intimacy-geopolitics where neither framing has primacy. Research on the connections between domestic violence and international warfare is longstanding, most recently highlighting how intimate violence is produced within warzones. The analysis here begins instead from intimate dynamics, to draw out the warlike nature of domestic violence in peacetime. Tactics of modern warfare are juxtaposed with the dynamics of domestic violence in suburban Scottish homes: shock and awe, hearts and minds, cultural and psychological occupation, just war and collateral damage. Resisting the temptation to regard domestic violence as everyday militarism, the relation is rotated: both violences continuously wind through the intimate-geopolitical. This spatial reconfiguration is structured by gender, race, class, nation and citizenship, resulting in uneven impacts from all kinds of intimate war. The interweaving of military and intimate themes is intended as a casting-off point for progressing political geographies that are attentive to intimacy as foundational in the workings of power across scale.

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Introduction

This paper contends that domestic violence and international warfare are part of a single complex of violence. 'Intimate war' is not a term for one or the other, but a description of both. For decades, feminist activists and researchers have pointed out the connection and its broader implications (INCITE!, 2006; Loyd, 2009; Tickner, 1992). However, with a few exceptions, political geographers have had little to say about domestic or sexual violence. This is unexpected in a discipline with a core interest in how spaces, places and scales produce and reproduce a whole range of social and political phenomena. Instead, over the last decade in particular, geographers have been engrossed in analysing war, terrorism and international conflict. While this attention is warranted, when placed alongside scant scholarship on other forms of violence it looks disproportionate and, ironically, is sometimes led by the mediated spectacle of global events which at the same time is under critique (Pain, 2009). Yet these forms of violence share bases of power with more pervasive intimate forms of violence: they are similarly located, they work through emotions, and there is always some enactment of resistance (Pain, 2014a, 2014b), all of which points to a shared analysis. Far more than

terrorism, which I have discussed elsewhere (Pain, 2014a), war is inseparable from the politics and experience of everyday life (Cuomo, 1996; Woodward, 2005), yet the spatial metaphors used to analyse war tend to situate it as different and distant (Sjoberg, 2013).

The starting point for the analysis here involves a specific articulation of the relation between the intimate and wider political structures. This articulation does not position the intimate as affected, or dripped down upon, by larger (geopolitical) processes. It does not restrict itself to drawing parallels between international/global on the one hand, and everyday/intimate on the other. Instead, it takes the intimate as a starting point or building block from which analysis moves out, both methodologically and conceptually, and asks what insights does this inverted orientation offer? This means examining the intimate dynamics of violence: the ways that military tactics and domestic violence operate through emotional and psychological registers that are as central to their effectiveness as incidents of direct physical harm. Military strategy is also-intimate: domestic violence is also-political. In both cases, these dynamics are made and lived. Wound into everyday lives, they are perpetrated, negotiated and resisted by individuals and groups of people in specific ways. They intersect with and frequently feed off obligations and customs of care, emotion, and social relations with others. And they are framed through gender,

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race and class, and refracted through the histories of places, nations and citizenship.

The project thus relates to – although it cannot fully answer – recent calls for International Relations as a discipline to understand war from the perspectives of those who experience it (Sjoberg, 2013; Sylvester, 2012), particularly to include a focus on its emotional dimensions (Sylvester, 2013). Sylvester (2013, 4) suggests that scholars should ‘stop averting our eyes and decide to descend into the ordinary of violence’. For over a decade, feminist political geographers have been doing just that, writing about war and its effects in ways that ably blend conceptual, empirical and activist concerns. Most, I suspect, would reject any binary division between scholars whose private and professional lives are supposedly insulated from violence (up here), and the lives of those we study (down there). Nonetheless, geographical research on domestic violence has been almost completely separate from these efforts. Such analysis may also form part of an emotional geopolitics (Pain, 2009) that explicates how emotions produce violence, fear, oppression and resistance across multiple spatial scales and sites (see also Cuomo, 2013; Pain, 2014a; Williams & Boyce, 2013). In this reading of emotions, they become highly significant to politics: rather than individualised or pathologised states, they are collective social forces that explode the boundaries and bifurcations that we too frequently draw.

The paper deliberately focuses on domestic violence close to home rather than at a distance; situated in the west, and experienced by women, children and men in some ways privileged as well as those marginalised by economic processes, social exclusion, racism and contexts of colonization. This helps to expose the political geographies of domestic violence in peacetime as well as in wartime. The two empirical cases here are women with different backgrounds that shaped the outcome of the violence they experienced, especially concerning their ethnicity and claims to citizenship. This too is a purposeful choice, intended to illuminate the everywhere-ness of intimate violence and the powerful underpinning of class, race and geopolitics in the political work that it does.

Because of this focus, inevitably a number of salient issues cannot be discussed here. The paper does not analyse domestic violence within international conflict, although these important connections are referred to in a number of places. It refers to some forms and contexts of war more than others, reflecting geographers’ recent work which has paid much attention to US involvement in conflicts overseas. In discussing war and domestic violence as parts of a single complex of violence, the aim is not to homogenise either. They tend to have some core characteristics, but are shaped by temporal, spatial, cultural and political contexts, and the efforts made by a whole range of actors to resist and combat them. The paper does not unpack the issue of civilian men affected by domestic violence or war. Women and children are more likely to be affected by these violences and their aftermaths, but that is not to erase the important and distinctive gendered experiences of men.

The paper begins with the assertion that domestic violence is political and should be analysed as such. It then summarises existing work exploring the connections between intimate violence and international warfare. The conceptual framing of intimacy-geopolitics is introduced. The paper then draws on empirical material to explore some of the intimate emotional and psychological dynamics of violence. Continuing to move between wider literature on war and domestic violence, it asks how we can make sense of the warlike nature of domestic violence in peacetime. The ways in which unequal victims are produced in the aftermath of war are discussed, and the paper concludes with some implications for political geography. The interweaving of military and everyday themes and terminology throughout is intended as a provocation,

providing some openings or casting-off points for further conversations within political geography about intimate violence in particular, and intimacy more generally as foundational in the workings of power across scale.

Domestic violence is political

Domestic violence is political, although it is not always considered in that way. If, as this paper goes on to argue, domestic violence is closely connected with warfare, sometimes part of warfare, and located within a network of violences which appear to be operating at different scales but in fact closely resemble each other, then it seems odd that this form of systemic violence is not routinely analysed as political. Its intimate dynamics are motivated by a wish to exert control, as we shall see later, and map onto broader power structures in society, especially those of patriarchy, class, racism and heterosexism (Dobash & Dobash, 1992; Holmes, 2009; Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005). Just as war is commonly viewed as a continuation of politics by other means, so domestic violence furthers the politics of oppression (Hanmer, 1978). Domestic violence is also enmeshed in state politics, which profoundly affect prevalence and outcomes. While during the twentieth century western states took up greater responsibility for prevention and policing, though often with limited success, there has always been an imbalance in resourcing compared to other forms of violence. Austerity in the west has led to cuts in domestic violence services and the provision of justice; these average 31% in the UK in recent years, but up to 70% for some organisations (Baird, 2012; McRobie, 2012). Neoliberal state policies, continued racism and sexism in the legal system, and involvement in global conflicts have had direct negative consequences for the security of those experiencing domestic violence (Phillips, 2008; Walklate, 2008).

A recent World Health Organisation report (WHO, 2013) makes clear the scale of the problem. 38% of murders of women worldwide are committed by an intimate partner, and 30% of women have experienced physical or sexual violence from an intimate partner. UK statistics also show that 30% of the adult female population have experienced domestic abuse since the age of 16 (Office for National Statistics, 2014). 88% of these offences are perpetrated by men against women. This violence is not diminishing over time (WHO, 2013).

However, there is a common characterization of domestic violence as involving only isolated individuals and private spaces, and this spatial imaginary both reflects and produces its usual framing as non-political. Dominant social and medical discourses still often characterise it as individualised, pathologised behaviour (Enadner & Holmberg, 2008; Herman, 1997). But like warfare, domestic violence is multiply sited. It seeps out and diffuses into the public sphere, affecting families, friends, and wider communities (Jones, 2010). In recent years, too, the home is increasingly becoming part of warzones of international conflict (Sjoberg, 2013) as civilians, especially mothers and children, become its main casualties (Jones, 2010; Loyd, 2009). The home is therefore a complex space of both security and violence (Fluri, 2010), as well as a key site of resistance to violence of all sorts. Both forms of violence are marked by a huge displacement of people from their homes. The trauma of forced migration due to war has long term health, economic and social consequences, and is a gendered phenomenon that largely affects women and children (Hans, 2004; Hyndman, 2000). According to the UNHCR, the UK, having had no recent wars on its turf, has no Internally Displaced Persons. But there are tens of thousands of forced migrations per year in the UK due to domestic violence. In England alone, in 2009–10 18,812 women accompanied by 18,819 children left their homes and previous lives behind, relocating to other parts of the country to escape domestic

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